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MANGA MAX®

TITAN

Recommended for mature readers

Number 20 US $5.99
Oct/Nov 2000 Can $7.99

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Mitsuteru Yokoyama

SAMURAI X
Ruroni Kenshin

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Kosaku Shima

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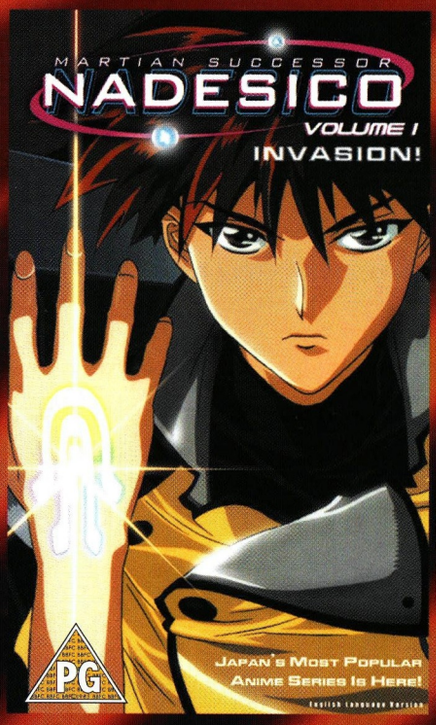

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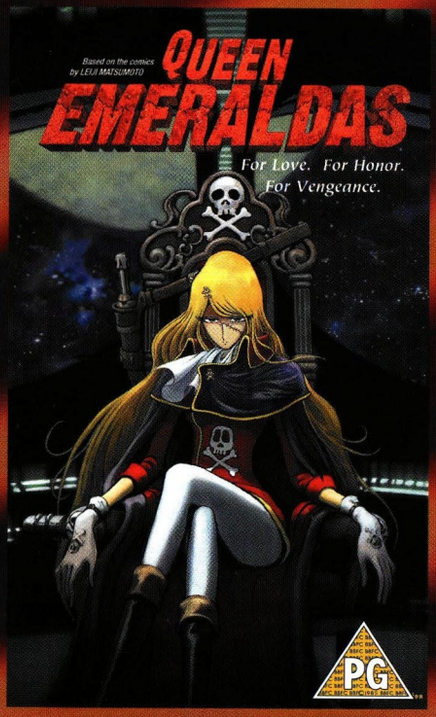

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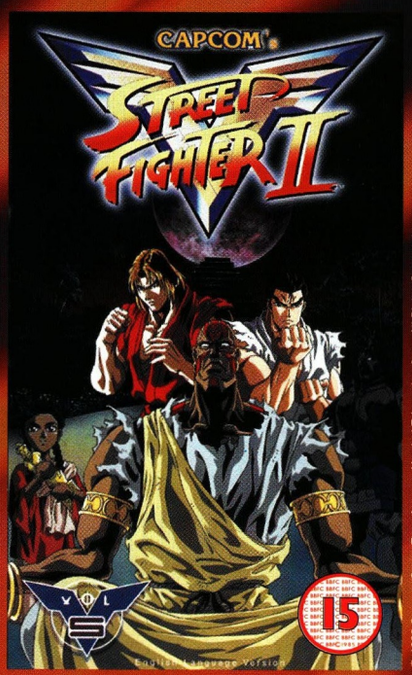

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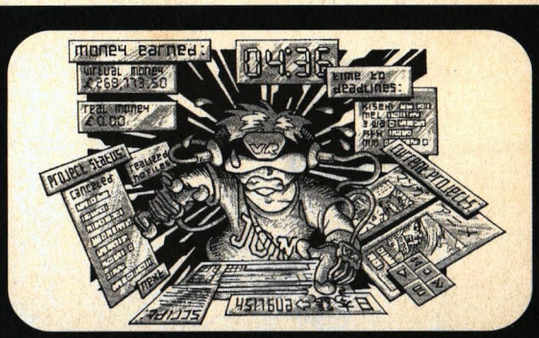
Quote of the month :
"I didn't see that coming!"
Darryl Curtis

This issue is dedicated to Roland Wilbur Wright, brother to Orville and, despite being a massive 9lb 6oz, still the smallest minion. Congratulations to Jagi and hubby.



The picture you see of me is from the long-gone 3WA e-zine. It was drawn by "Mike", an otherwise anonymous Dutch artist, to show just how manic the translator's life can be. But editing a magazine, filling that blank void once a month with timely stuff, is even worse. This is why I've just spent the last weekend in virtual attendance at AX2000, (too far to hitch-hike), staring at my screen till my eyes went swirly, to make sure we could cram everything in. Minions have been on full alert, checking titles and researching plots, often with only minutes to spare. The turnaround in anime news is now almost daily. This, as they say, is yet another example of something.

Jonathan Clements, Editor

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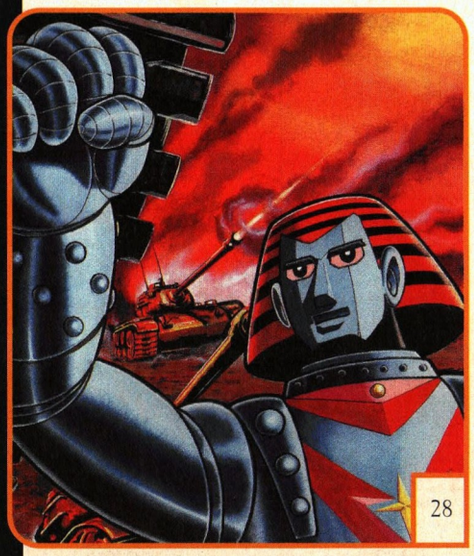

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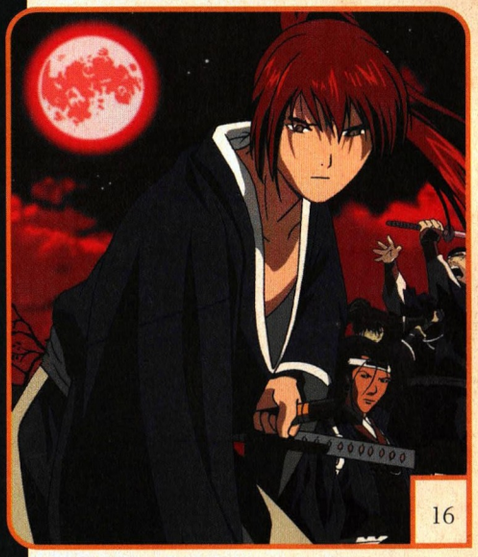

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Wired

The NEWS Finder

THE LOW DOWN ON UPCOMING ANIME, MANGA ACTION AND OTHER WEIRDNESS

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VIZ COLLECT CORRECTOR

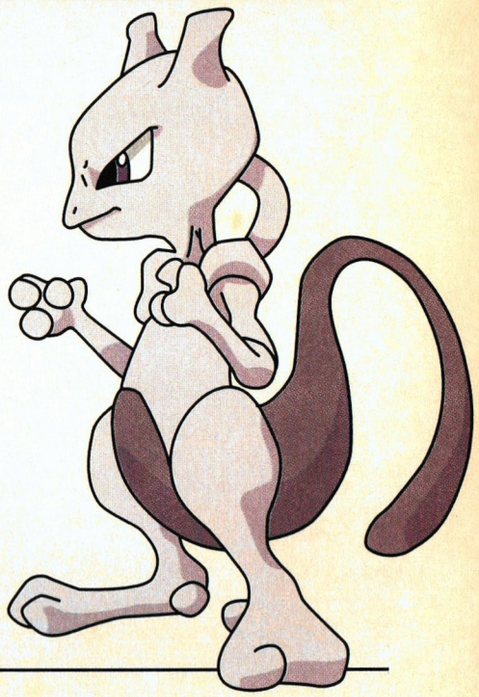
According to Kia Asamiya's US publisher Fanboy Entertainment, rivals Viz have acquired the rights to the artist's *Corrector Yui*. The high-tech tale of a schoolgirl who has to save the world from a cyberspace invasion, *Corrector Yui*'s mix of magic (she's got a "Fairy Suit"), collecting (she needs eight bits of software) and adventure (which will be new to anyone who doesn't remember *Tron*) make it a likely candidate for foreign release. Could the anime be following close behind?. ●

Sources this issue

Animage, Anime News Service, Anime on DVD, AX, Ben Carter, Lee Brimmicombe-Wood, Daily Radar, *EX*, *Hollywood Reporter*, John Freeman, *Japan Times*, Kevin Lillard, *Newtype*, Sci Fi Wire, Jim Swallow, Motoko Tamamuro, Amos Wong.

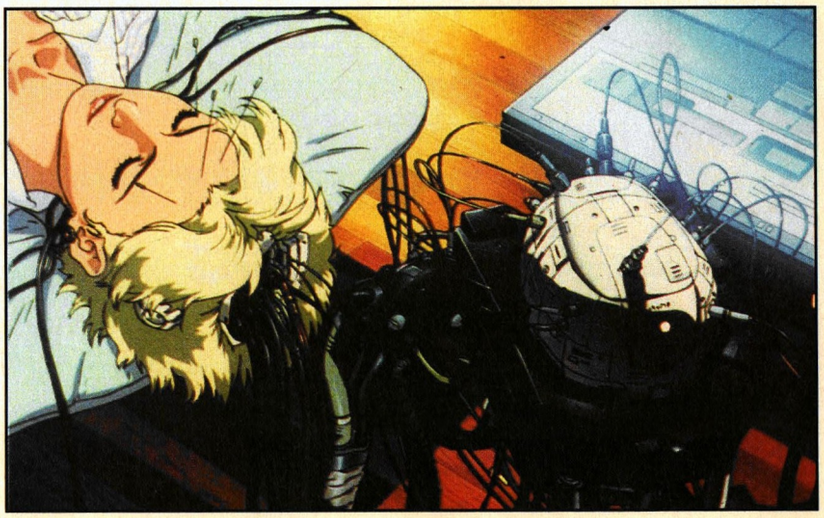
GOTTA SUE 'EM ALL

Jason Paige, the soft rock popster responsible for the "catchy" theme tune of Warner Bros US-dubbed *Pokemon* television series, has his Pikachus all in a twist – although unconcerned that the song "Gotta Catch 'Em All", as performed by Paige and his popular beat combo, is being sung off-key in playgrounds and schoolyards around the world, the singer is now intent on suing the US arm of video games giant Nintendo, creators of the original *Pokémon* games, for improper use of his witty little ditty. According to recent reports, Paige's legal claims are that Nintendo of America have swindled him out of substantial royalty fees and rights payments for the use of voice in adverts for *Pokemon* products. The singer is demanding a cool $120 million for damages and costs – and that's not Pika-feed. ●



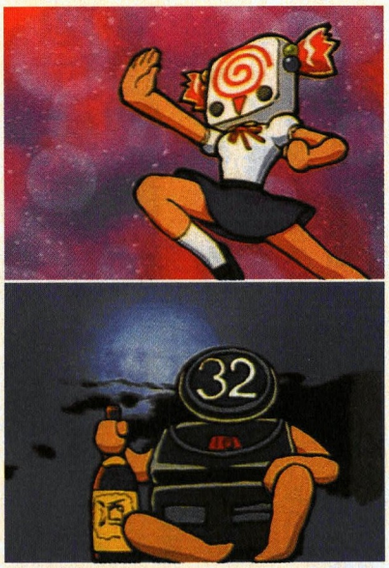
ATOMIC SUSHI

Sydney's Silicon Pulp Animation Gallery is mounting an exhibition of anime art from 11 August to 14 October 2000. The Australian exhibition will feature original artworks from the renowned Japanese animation studio Production IG, including hand-painted cels and backgrounds, scripts and storyboards, imageboards and design illustrations, digital prints and a life-size model from film classics *Ghost in the Shell* and *Jin-Roh*, their latest film *Blood*, plus the sensational television series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Other groundbreaking anime material on display includes works from *Akira*, *Astro Boy* and *Urusei Yatsura* amongst others.●



PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Winter 2000 sees the world's worst case of product placement hitting Japanese screens – if you never thought the anime business was in trouble before, you will now. Originally serialised in *Dreamcast Magazine* as a comic by the suspiciously named "Something" Yoshimatsu, with the subtle title of *Sega Games are the Best in the World!*, the new television series features the adventures of a girl with a Dreamcast machine instead of a brain, and a boozy Megadrive 32 console. Written, directed, designed and animated by Takahiro Yoshimatsu *[a relative of the creator, perhaps? – dim-witted Ed.]*, the show has been rushed into production with record speed. "It's my first time directing," confessed Yoshimatsu to *Newtype* magazine, but doubtless not his last if this is the kind of corporate sponsorship being thrown around in the current climate. ●



© 2000 Something Yoshimatsu/Soft Bank

SOAP DUDS

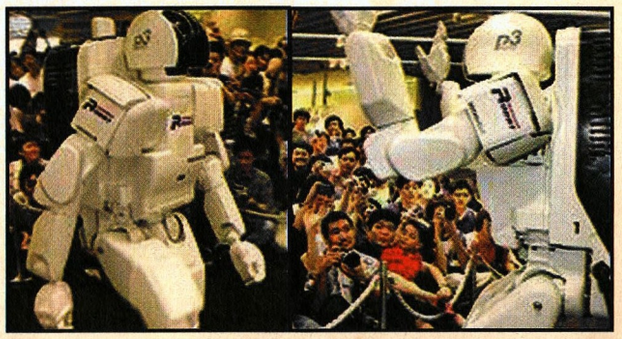
Anime characters are entertaining Japanese "fans" in ways the designers never expected (or authorised). During an Anime Central interview, *Saber Marionettes* designer Tsukasa Kotobuki said that there are massage parlours in Japan where customers can engage the services of young women dressed as anime characters, including the *Saber Marionettes*. "I'm led to believe that many people in the industry patronise these facilities," he said. Kotobuki supposedly found out when some of the female employees of one of these establishments told him (at a convention, of course) how much they liked wearing his designs. *Manga Max* would enjoy to see a copyright infringement case, since the anime licence holders would also have to explain what they were doing on site. ●

LOVE HINA COMING SOON

Barely two months after making its TV anime debut in Japan, Ken Akamatsu's *Love Hina* is to be translated as the next in Kodansha's Bilingual manga line. Joining the ranks of *Shima Kosaku* (see page 36) it's the tale of a 19-year-old latch-key kid, besieged by an old flame who swore to marry him when they were both only four. Consequently, with large doses of *Tenchi*-cloning and "cuteness", it stands a much better chance of making it to the West. No US company has announced plans to bring over the anime, but *Manga Max* predicts it will be sooner rather than later. ●

ONE SMALL STEP

Car giants Honda have unveiled the P3, the world's most advanced bipedal robot, with a 25-minute power charge and the ability to walk up stairs and perform simple tasks with its hands. The 1.6 metre-tall robot has a magnesium skeleton, weighs 130 kilos, and has been under development since 1986. The Honda press department refused to be drawn on its alleged ability to transform into a fighter jet and fire homing lasers... ●



INCOMING COMIC TITLES: AUGUST

CPM MANGA

Weather Woman 1; Tetsu Adachi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Aquarium 5; Tomoko Taniguchi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Maxion 9; Takeshi Takebayashi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Time Traveller Ai 11; Ai Iijima and Takeshi Takebayashi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Martian Successor Nadesico 15; Kia Asamiya, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Geobreeders 18; Akihiro Ito, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Dark Angel 16; Kia Asamiya, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Record of Lodoss War: The Grey Witch 22; Mizuno/Ochi, B&W, 32pp $2.95
Immoral Angel 8; B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Time Traveller Ai TP 1; Iijima/Takebayashi, B&W, $15.95

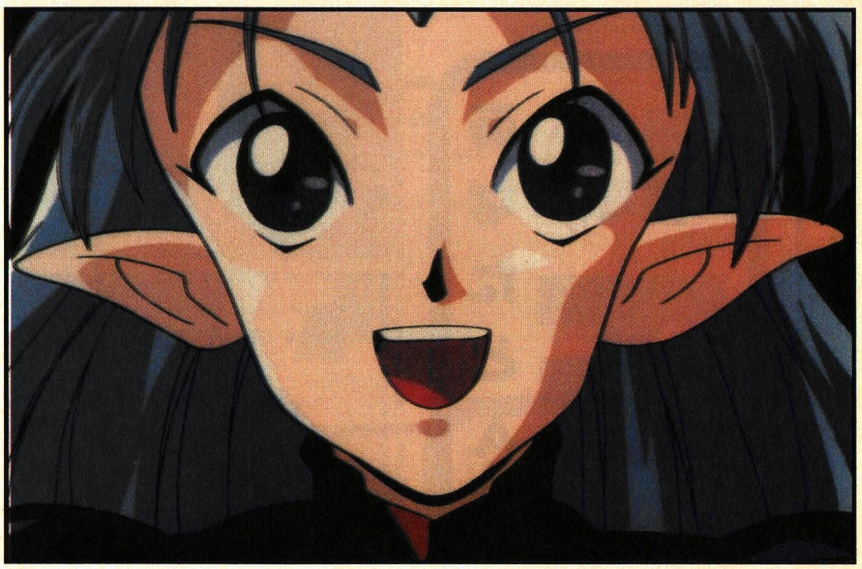
ANTARCTIC

Warrior Nun Areala 3.14; Farrens/Dunn, FC, 20pp $2.50
Gold Digger 2.14; Fred Perry, FC, 20pp $2.50
World War III 1946 14; Nomura/Dunn, B&W, 20pp, $2.50
Mangazine 14; Various, FC, 80+pp, $8.99
Gigantor 7; Dunn and Nomura, 20pp, $2.50
Courageous Princess 8; Dean Hsieh, FC, 72pp, $11.95

DARK HORSE

Lone Wolf & Cub; B&W, 300pp,
Digimon 5; Full Colour, 32pp, $2.95
Gunsmith Cats: Kidnapped 10; Kenichi Sonoda, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Oh! My Goddess: 8.8; Kosuke Fujishima, B&W, 40pp, $3.50
Blade of the Immortal 48; Hiroaki Samura, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Shadow Lady 23; Masakazu Katsura, B&W, 24pp, $2.50
Dirty Pair: Run from the Future 8; Warren and Kinnaird, FC, 32pp, $2.95
Super Manga Blast 6; Various, B&W, 128pp, $4.95
Usagi Yojimbo 40; Sakai, B&W, 24pp, $2.95

NAZI SPACE ELVES FROM PLANET BANDAI

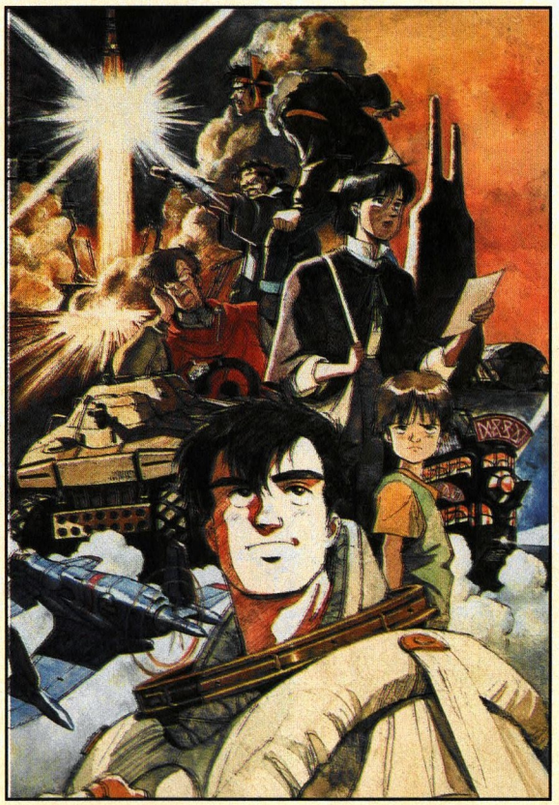


Known variously as *Celestial Crest* and *Emblem of the Star World*, the anime adaptation of Hiroyuki Morioka's *Seikai no Monsho* series is slated for a US release as *Crest of the Stars*, courtesy of Bandai. Lead character Jinto Lin is the heir-apparent of planet Martine, a world whose people were conquered by the alien Abh invaders when he was a child. Despised by his people as a collaborator, he leaves for indoctrination on the Abh homeworld.

Spawning a PlayStation game and a sequel (*Celestial Banner*) the series was directed by *Idol Project*'s Yasushi Nagaoka. For what *Manga Max* makes of it, see MM15. ●

NEW ON UK TV

21-26 August sees an "anime week" on the UK's Sci-Fi channel (http://uk.scifi.com), featuring some of their newest acquisitions including *Orguss 02*, *Monster City*, *Lensman*, *Wings of Honneamise* and *Roujin Z*. Early plans to screen *Gunbuster* were thwarted by the absence of a dubbed version. Viewers of U Direct in the UK (www.udirect.co.uk) will also get a chance in August to see *Midnight Eye Goku*, *Tokyo Revelation*, *Devilman* and *Zeguy*. ●



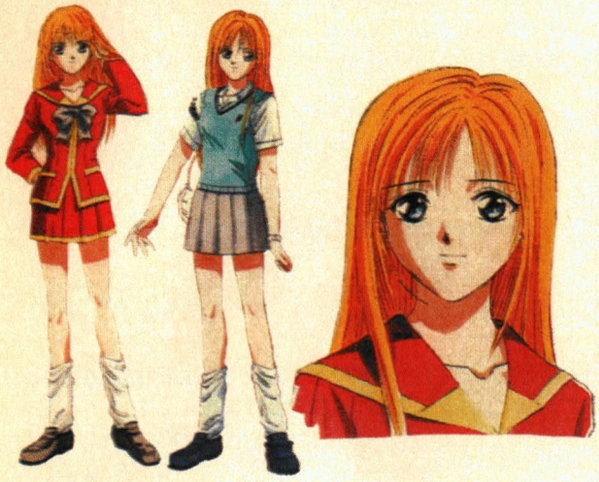
ROBOTECH RETURNS

All 85 episodes of *Robotech*, the famous re-edit of the original Macross series and two other shows, have been picked up for re-release by AD Vision. Enlisting the help of original show-runner Carl Macek, the US company will be including many extras, including trailers, voice-actor interviews and historical information on the DVD version. However, a spokesman for ADV ruled out sub/dub versions, explaining that those rights were not available – they were sold to AnimEigo in a separate deal.

In other news, ADV have picked up the *You're Under Arrest* movie for both video and DVD. MM12 correspondent "Aron Bacon", who was sure that the title would never be seen in the UK, may be forced to buy Satan "a fur-lined coat, sleigh and eight huskies to go to work with", sometime in late 2001. ●

TV CERES

Mysterious Ceres, the story of a Japanese girl who is a descendant of the titular goddess, fighting her own ancestor for control of her missing wings, was a hit for *Fushigi Yugi* creator Yu Watase, and adapted into an anime series earlier this year. Now, Viz Communications have announced their acquisitions of the rights. At a panel at California's Anime Expo, they also announced their intention to put in a bid *for Inu Yasha*, the new anime adaptation of the Rumiko Takahashi manga they already publish. ●



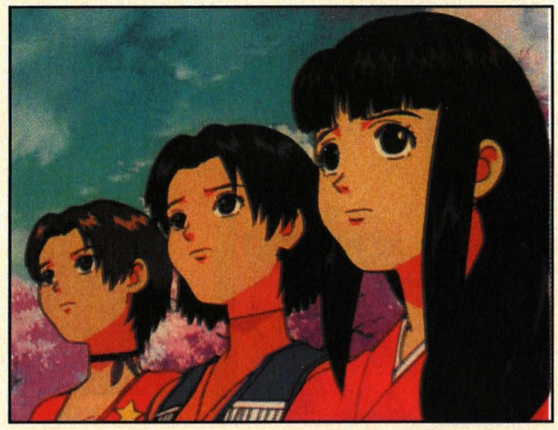
© 2000 Yu Watase/Shogakukan/Bandai Visual/Studio Pierrot

DUB UGLY

When an Americanism slips into an anime dub, complaints follow that the artistic integrity of the original has been violated. But what happens when the creator of a series likes the change? That happened in the *Lodoss War* anime, according to Crispin Freeman, who played Sparks in the dub. Director Mitch Alben decided to have some of the characters speak as if they were from Queens in New York City, replacing the original puns written by Ryo Mizuno. "Mizuno was very happy with the English production and with the direction," said Freeman, who also noted that Mizuno thought up the *Lodoss* character names in English, not Japanese. *[Well that's all right then – Ed.]*. ●

LAND MINE

The robot show Z-*Mine*, or *Spring Pretty-Girl Synchro Robot Zee-Mine*, to give it its traditionally portentous title, is coming to the US from Bandai next year. Duplicating more than just the feel of old-school battle-serials, it's set in the 1970s, where lead girl Ayame, on her way home from viewing the cherry blossoms (like you do), is attacked by strange men and dragged, along with her two little sisters, into a new role as a giant robot pilot. Director is *Landlock*'s Yasuhiro Matsumura. ●



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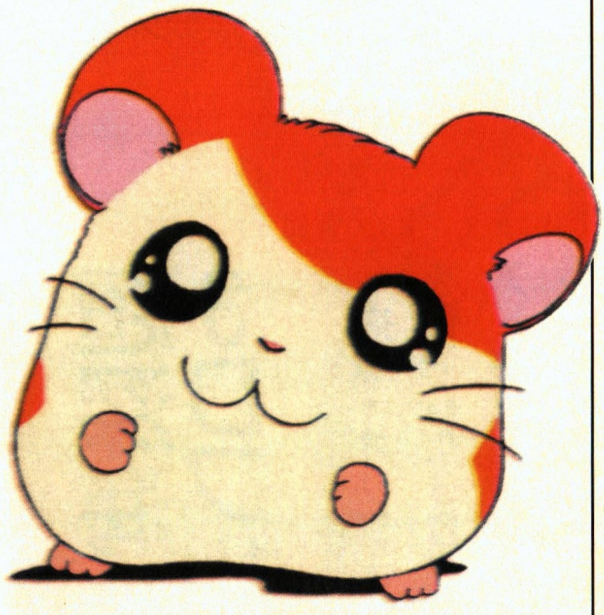
HAMSTER INSERTION



Hamtaro is a happy hamster, who lives with his owner, 5-year-old Hiroko. He sleeps in a little house on the buffet counter in the kitchen, in a house, in a quiet suburban street. But in the park, across the street, under the roots of the old tree, there is a hideout where the local hamsters go for secret meetings. Where, it says here, they indulge in "happy incidents", in this television outing for Ritsuko Kawai's manga *Hamtaro the Hamster*. Meanwhile, during "animation week" in the UK, it looks like Channel 4 will be concentrating on sex and violence in anime for a change. Because that's all there is, isn't there? ●

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IRONCAT

Deadly Curve: The Gun Crisis Prelude 6; Masaomi Kanzaki, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Hyper Dolls 4.6; Shinpei Itoh, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
New Vampire Miyu 5.9; Narumi Kakinouchi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Sepia 8; Senno Knife, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Ogenki Clinic 6.4; B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Futaba-Kun Change 4.8; B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Vampire Princess Yui 2; B&W, 32pp, $2.95

RADIO COMIX

Astrider Hugo 2; Hisao Tamaki, B&W, 40pp, $3.95

TOKYOPOP.COM (FORMERLY MIXX)

Gundam Wing 7; B&W, 48pp, $2.95
Card Captor Sakura 9; Clamp, B&W, 48pp, $2.95
Tokyo Pop 3.12; Magazine, 96pp, B&W, $4.99
Sailor Moon 23; Takeuchi, B&W, 48pp, $2.95

VIZ COMMUNICATIONS

Aqua Knight 5; Kishiro, B&W, 48pp, $3.50
Magical Pokemon Journey 6; Yuji Tsukirino, B&W, 48pp, $4.95
Eagle 7; Kaiji Kawaguchi, B&W, 112pp, $6.95
Pokemon Adventures 7; Kusaka and MATO, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Animerica 8.8; Magazine, 96pp, $4.95
Pulp 4.9; Various, B&W, 128pp, $5.95
Animerica Extra 3.9; Various, B&W, 128pp, $4.95
Silent Möbius: Karma 10; Asamiya, B&W, 40pp, $3.25
Ranma 9.4; Rumiko Takahashi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Inu Yasha: A Feudal Fairy Tale 4.10; Takahashi, B&W, 40pp, $3.25
Dragonball 3.3; Akira Toriyama, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Dragonball Z 3.7; Akira Toriyama, B&W, 32pp, $2.95
Tenchi 9.5; Okuda, B&W, 32pp, $2.95

INCOMING UK VIDEO RELEASES: AUGUST

AD VISION

Martian Successor Nadesico; £12.99, dub, 60 mins
Queen Emeraldas; £12.99, dub, 60 mins
Streetfighter V 5; ££1.99, dub, 60 mins

MANGA ENTERTAINMENT

Magic Knight Rayearth 2
Ninja Scroll DVD, £17.99

INCOMING US VIDEO RELEASES: AUGUST

AD VISION (including Soft Cel)

Gasaraki 1; $19.98/$29.98
Nadesico 5; $19.98/$29.95

BANDAI

Brainpowered 5; $29.98
Crest of the Stars 1; $29.98
Cowboy Bebop DVD 6; $29.98
Outlaw Star DVD 2; $29.98

PIONEER

Sailor Moon Supers: Dream Black Hole; $14.98/$29.98
Sol Bianca (new) 2; $24.98/$29.98
Tenchi on Earth; $29.98

MANGA VIDEO

X the Movie; $19.95
Cyber City Oedo; $24.95
Genocyber DVD; $39.99
Odin DVD; $34.95. Mmm, we've been waiting for that one.

CENTRAL PARK MEDIA (inc. Software Sculptors/Anime 18)

Apocalypse Zero 2; $19.95
Shamanic Princess Talisman Unleashed; $19.99/$24.99
Slayers try 4; $19.99/$19.99
Midnight Panther DVD ROM; $29.99

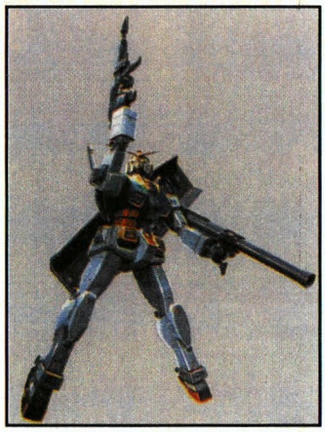
VIZ VIDEO

Dragon Ball Z (number unknown); $14.95
Key the Metal Idol DVD; $29.98

RIGHT STUF

Imma Yojo Erotic Temptress 3; $29.95
Kimba 5-7; $14.98 each
Tylor 1; $19.95

BARREL SCRAPING?



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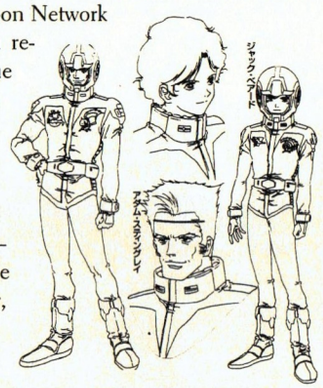
Macross designer Haruhiko Mikimoto has been drawing new characters for a *Gundam*-themed ride, unveiled at Japan's Fuji Express Highland amusement park. The five-minute ride takes 60 passengers a time, and features new animation from chief director Yoshiyuki Tomino, assisted by Nobuhiro Kindo. Set in the *Gundam* year 0079, the passengers get to ride along with Jack Baird and Adam Stingray, two pilots fighting over the A Boa Ku space station.

And talking of 79, after months of speculation, Bandai have announced that they intend to release the original *Gundam* series in its entirety in the US. So far, they have only released the compilation movies edition, but the success of *Gundam Wing* on the Cartoon Network is thought to have led to a re-think. Now the whole antique series will be coming to America sometime in 2001, though Manga Max suspects that this is a decision made by someone with only half the facts – sure, it looks great to have "more of the same" on paper, but the original *Gundam* series is 21 years old..." ●



ARMITAGE SEQUEL

Pioneer Executive Producer Hideki Goto has confirmed the rumour that his company is working on a sequel to the acclaimed *Armitage III* video series. Though few further details are available at present, the new story is thought to be another video series, featuring a return of *Armitage III* script-writer Chiaki Konaka, currently promoting his newest work *Malice Doll* in the Japanese magazines. Earlier reports, spread by an over-eager news feed on the US Sci-Fi Channel, that *Serial Experiments Lain* was going to get a sequel, were hotly denied. *[Note to US Sci-Fi: there's more than one show with a girl and a computer in it – Ed.]* ●

SNAZZY PAPARAZZI

Saki Kitazawa is a photographer for a gossip magazine, the daughter of a famous war cameraman, who is missing in action. With nobody else to care for, she lives to chase after hot stories. Saki thinks she's onto a cover story when she snaps a rock star in a compromising position at a party, but discovers that South East Asian gun-runners are keen on "persuading" her to give up her film.

But you won't see *Scandal* on video or TV – it's a game. With the straight-to-video industry falling apart and low budgets crippling TV, the biggest money-spinner for anime is gaming. *Scandal* uses 30,000 cels (*Spriggan* had 50,000, but that was a movie!) and if it looks familiar, that may be because it's from Production IG, the studio behind *Ghost in the Shell*, *Jin-roh* and *Blood*. Featuring car chases inspired by *The Italian Job* and over three hours of animation, this is one to watch for. **www.scei.jp** ●

Spotlight on:

Master of Yin and Yang

Mere months after Neil Gaiman's acclaimed *Dream Hunters* collaboration with Yoshitaka Amano, another Western big name has hooked up with a Japanese artist for an international project. This time it's musical: a lavishly packaged double CD set, based on a successful manga. The first disc features music from classical Japanese instruments, while the second is essentially a brand new mini-album of ambient music from Brian Eno, the famed avant-garde composer, producer and founder member of Roxy Music, best known for his work with U2, Talking Heads and David Bowie.

"We thought we'd have two CDs, uniting Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth, East and West, Past and Future," enthused the artist Reiko Okano. Her manga, *Master of Ying and Yang*, is set in 10th century Kyoto at the Imperial court, where royal sorcerer Abeno Seimei undertakes projects to dispel evil spirits from the nobles' lives. Beset by phantoms and demons brought into being by people's own frustrations and desires, the story is nevertheless remarkably sedate. There's less of the ghost-busting that one might expect, and more meaningful chats, as Abeno becomes involved in the intrigues all around him.

The life of the rich in ancient Japan is beautifully portrayed, even down to the passion-killer "moth eyebrows" affected by the women and the stifling ritual associated with daily life. Even the hauntings, when they appear, are done in keeping with the spirit and expectations of the time, not the grandstanding common to modern-day horror.

Artist Okano made her name in the 1980s with *Fancy Dance*, a contemporary tale of the son of a Zen monk, who falls in love with a modern Tokyo girl. The series spun off into an image album, music to read it by, if you will, produced by Okano's husband Makoto "Son of Osamu" Tezuka. In 1999, Okano began a 12-part adaptation of Baku Yumemakura's *Master of Yin and Yang* novel. Despite the author's original objection, he was soon won round, and it was inevitable that Okano would seek to produce a similar image album to accompany her newest work.

Classical musician Sukeyasu Shiba provided a CD of authentic court music from the time, but Okano took a risk and scribbled a note to Brian Eno, "the Emperor of Ambient". Eno was flattered by the offer, and threw himself into the project with gusto. "At the time, I knew nothing about her work and very little about Heian period history," he admitted. "My only contact with medieval Japan came from reading the *Pillow Book* of Sei Shonagon several years ago, but that had left a deep enough impression for me to think I had some sense of the flavour of the time."

Perhaps as befits an image album, Eno and his associate Peter Schwalm relied almost solely on visual evidence from the pages of the manga. "I couldn't read them, although my sister-in-law Charmian Norman-Taylor helped me by translating some sections, but the drawings gave me a strong sense of an atmosphere – mysterious, sometimes slightly sinister. We decorated the inside of the studio with pages. As we worked, we would start to associate with particular pages, and I would ask Charmian what the text was saying."

Eno was also inspired by listening to gagaku and bugaku music of the type that would have been heard in that period of history: "We didn't try to copy anything directly, but tried to make a kind of music that would be consistent with it – a sort of parallel musical universe which could possibly have existed."

The atmosphere that Eno soaked up from the manga comes through strongly in the resulting half dozen tracks. Created entirely on computer, the style will be familiar to fans of Eno's other ambient work: soundscapes with little or no melody, but a wonderful sense of space and emotion. The album's liquid, metallic sounds and strange, ethereal voices (including heavily treated samples of a waitress from Eno's local Japanese restaurant!) are reminiscent of a 'music for images' commission Eno took on in 1983, writing a soundtrack to go with NASA's retrospective film of the Apollo moon landings. The *Apollo* album is thought by many to be one of Eno's finest, so his many followers will no doubt love this. For readers of the manga who leave it quietly rumbling away on the stereo in the background, it will open up a whole new dimension to the story. ●

Reporting by Adam Newell. *The Master of Yin and Yang* is available now from Victor records, serial number vicp-60981

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Ray of Lig

As Rayearth comes to the UK, Wicked Wit of the West Peter J Evans examines this magical anime

Cephiro is a world where reality is driven by the power of will – here, wishing hard enough can achieve anything, fears can become monsters, and love, if it is strong enough, can bind a world together or tear it apart. It is a place of strange wonders and unspeakable supernatural danger, of spell-casters and machine-gods and magical weapons. But now the Pillar of Cephiro – its living, stabilising heart – has been stolen, and it is up to three unsuspecting Tokyo schoolgirls to stop an entire world flying apart at the seams...

Hikaru Shidou, Fuu Hououji and Umi Ryuzaki are the three schoolgirls who are destined to become the Magic Knights of Cephiro, although they have no idea of this when they first meet on a school trip to Tokyo Tower. Hikaru is small and rather tomboyish, with red hair and a skill at martial arts explained by the fact that her father owns a dojo. Bespectacled Umi is stereotypically shy and reserved, but a dab hand with a longbow, while the tall and elegant Fuu has her heart set on winning an upcoming fencing tournament. This spread of potentially lethal abilities is what distinguishes the three from all the other 14-year-olds on the Tower, and when Emeraude, the Princess of Cephiro, calls out for help, it is Hikaru, Umi and Fuu who are dragged by the power of her wish out of their own reality and into hers.

The story of this world, and of the three legendary warriors recruited to save it is told in *Magic Knight Rayearth*, a manga series from the popular creative team Studio Clamp. *Rayearth* has since been made into an animated television series, a trio of videos, a movie and enough books, computer games, soundtracks and assorted merchandise to set any shelf groaning. In addition, this is a Japanese tale that appears to have truly international appeal: so far *Magic Knight Rayearth* has been translated into English, French, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Indonesian!

The *Rayearth* manga first saw print in late 1993, when publishing house Kodansha released the opening chapter in the November issue of *Nakayoshi*. The story proved quite a hit, and stretched over more than 30 chapters until it finished in April of 1996 with a double-length finalé.

THE EMERAUDE CITY

Justifiably perturbed at being hauled across realities and deposited on the back on a giant airborne fish, the girls get some measure of explanation from Clef, a childlike but ancient magician whose task it is to mould the newcomers into the Magic Knights. Clef must awaken the power within the three and guide them, as far as he is able, on their quest to save his world. For Emeraude is more than just a Princess – she is the 'Pillar' whose prayers hold Cephiro together. Imprisoned by the high priest Zagato, Emeraude finds her influence waning, and without her influence reality is beginning to crumble...

Before long Clef is taken out of the picture by Zagato's minions, and it is up to the girls themselves to gather the weapons, armour and spells they will need to save Emeraude and Cephiro. Until they do, there is no way back to their own world: the path between realities has been blocked by Emeraude's wish. For Hikaru, Umi and Fuu, failure is not an option.

ht

from the creators of Card Captors.

Above: Umi.

This is the start of a story which could, in less competent hands, have become nothing more than yet another magical-girl story with lots of pretty-boy characters and a dragon or two. However, *Rayearth*'s creators took a somewhat different approach to the rest of the tale. After the would-be Knights hunt down the enchanted substance to make their weapons and armour (which from then on receive regular upgrades, much in the style of a role-playing game), they have to seek out the shrines of the Mashin, godlike beings which merge with them to form gigantic machines, their primary method of combat. Along the way they meet a variety of stock fantasy characters, but also Mokona, a fuzzball who resembles nothing so much as an inflated rabbit, and whose only dialogue consists of a few chirps and coos. Much like *Tenchi Muyo*'s Ryo-Oh-Ki, though, Mokona is far more than he seems.

In addition, rather than the predictable happy ending one might have expected, the first volume of *Magic Knight Rayearth* ends in tragedy and despair. The Knights find they have been used, that their quest is a lie, and that Cephiro is doomed whatever they do. It is this conclusion which drives the characters into the second half of the story, back across the reality divide and into a ravaged and broken Cephiro, in an attempt to heal both the once-beautiful kingdom and their own damaged psyches.

NOT IN KANSAI ANYMORE

This twisting of story conventions is one of the things Studio Clamp do best. An all-female creative team based in the Kansai area of Japan, Clamp began their work in fanzines. Clamp rose to fame in 'Comic Market', the centre of the Japanese fanzine circuit, before emerging onto the professional stage with *RG Veda* in 1989 – by this time their 11 original members had been whittled down to seven, and now just four remain.

Studio Clamp's individual members are Satsuki Igarashi, Mikku (Mick) Nekoi, Mokona Apapa and Nanase Okawa. Rather than each member keeping rigidly to a specific task within the group, they take turns writing and creating their comics; a flexible approach that has produced a wide range of titles, from the psychic murder-mysteries of *Night Head* and *Tokyo Babylon*, to the lush fantasy worlds of *RG Veda*.

Magic Knight Rayearth was drawn by Clamp's principle artist, Mokona Apapa, and displays all of her stylistic trademarks – slender, androgynous and elegant character design, lyrical scenery and complex artwork. It is no coincidence that the comic's rabbit-like character, who spawns useful technology on demand and is finally revealed to be the creator of Cephiro and everything within it, shares her name.

Below: Fuu.

PATCHWORK GIRLS

The *Magic Knight Rayearth* television series debuted in Japan in late 1994, following the format of the original comic quite closely, with the first series running for 20 episodes between 1994 and 1995 and finishing with an hour long '*Rayearth* Special'. The second run, in 1995, lasted for 29 episodes. Chief director on both series was Toshihiro (later Toshiki) Hirano, the creator of *Vampire Princess Miyu* and *Fight! Iczer-1*.

While the first television series mirrors the manga plot almost exactly, some divergence occurs in the second. Here, Mokona's influence is reduced – the little furball is no longer Cephiro's creator, but merely a useful (and unusual) magic-user. New characters have been introduced, including Debonair and her creation Nova, who turns out to be the incarnation of Hikaru's sorrow and pain: she attacks everything that Hikaru loves, until the two are finally reconciled and merge back into one whole person again. And the final battle for the Pillar of Cephiro is a far more conventional good-versus-evil showdown.

While the changes made to the story in the television version range from minor tweaks to quite important structural alterations, they are nothing compared to the video series. First released in 1997, and with the title shortened to simply *Rayearth*, these three videos focussed on the same characters from the comic and TV series, but wove them into a highly modified story. Here, Hikaru (now a gymnast), Umi and Fuu are friends before we see them, and are preparing for graduation. A cherry tree within sight of Tokyo Tower forms a meeting place for the three girls, and it is there that they make a wish that, no matter what happens, their friendship will endure. According to legend, the tree contains a spirit which will remove any obstacle to such a wish coming true. Hikaru privately scorns the idea, until an earth tremor shakes the spirit – Mokona – out of the tree!

THE WIZARDS OF IX?

The tremor is a portent of things to come. The kingdom of Cephiro is attempting to break through into our world, causing earthquakes and forcing a now-adult Clef to send the entire planetary population (barring the soon-to-be Magic Knights) into a time warp to protect them. Alone in a deserted Tokyo, the girls encounter the witch Alcyone, whose ice-magic threatens to destroy them all until Hikaru learns how to merge with the Mashin Lexus and gives the sorceress an explosive taste of her own medicine. This is now a mecha combat story with magical trappings, with skyscrapers blasted apart and beam weapons flashing beneath a storm-whipped Tokyo sky.

These segments of the story (later condensed, with some additional footage, into the 1998 movie *Wings of Hope*) have much in common with one of Hirano's previous projects, *Fight! Iczer-1*. Hikaru's first intimation of the massive events falling into place around her take place during a waking dream caused by Mokona, where she is transported to a vast, empty realm and contacted by her Mashin, Lexus. In *Iczer-1*, schoolgirl Nagisa is pulled into a very similar place (although filled with harsh planes rather than soft-edged bubbles) in order to be attacked by her enemies. When Hikaru proves herself worthy to join with Lexus, she finds herself naked in a womb-like

Above: What a scorcher; cover girl Hikaru.

THE CAR'S THE STAR

As is often the case with Japanese productions, many of the character names in *Magic Knight Rayearth* have meanings that go beyond simple labels. Rayearth itself, the designation of the ultimate Mashin used by the Magic Knights, is said to refer to a world (Earth) full of light (Ray). Likewise, Hikaru Shidou can be translated as Light of the Lion Temple (her Mashin, Lexus, appears as a fiery lion), Umi Ryuzaki as Ocean of the Blooming Dragon and Fuu Hououji as Wind of the Phoenix Shrine.

What is slightly more peculiar is the number of characters named after cars. Most obvious is Lexus, named for the luxury Toyota, but fellow Mashins Windam, Regalia and Selece also share the names of other Toyotas. The princess of Cephiro is named after the Mitsubishi Emeraude, Clef after a discontinued Mazda and Zagato after a 1950s racing Lancia. Other name-checks go to the Nissan Presea (a beautiful weapon-smith who forges the Magic Knights' swords), the Honda Civic Ferio (a swordsman), the Mazda Lantis (Zagato's brother), the Nissan Primera and literally dozens more, with the names of cars and dealerships going to characters, places and even magic spells…

bubble – the control system of a giant mecha. This is identical to the fate of Nagisa; transported into Iczer-Robo and used to emotionally power the living machine's weapons systems. The battles that ensue are almost blow-for-blow, too, and even the revelation that Hikaru must use the power of her hatred and anger to power the Mashin's weapons (a complete inversion of the classic *Star Wars* philosophy of not giving into the dark side!) is exactly what happens in the earlier story.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Iczer-1 re-tread or no, the recent release of the *Rayearth* videos in the UK is going to generate a whole new army of fans. Those new viewers might be interested in some of the other media excursions

taken by the Magic Knights: for example, owners of the Sega Saturn games console might have seen the *Rayearth* RPG, translated and released in America by Working Designs. A highly-regarded game in the Squaresoft mould, the RPG follows the set-up of the original story and then lets the player guide the Magic Knights on their quest to save Cephiro. The graphics are mainly of the super-deformed mode seen in *Secret of Mana* and suchlike, but with vast numbers of animation frames and several anime-style cutscenes. The Game Boy and Game Gear each have *Rayearth* releases, as does the ill-fated Sega Pico.

Kodansha have released at least ten books on the series, ranging from large-format art publications to a lushly-illustrated guide to the computer game! Music from the show (and 'inspired' by it) can be found on a wide range of CDs, and the whole series can be found on laser disc, video tape and DVD. Add to this the usual small mountain of assorted character merchandise and any *Rayearth* fan trying to collect everything graced by an image of the Magic Knights is in for a wallet-busting time.

Whether the world of Cephiro will be the home to any new adventures remains to be seen: Studio Clamp have gone on to other projects, such as the popular *Card Captors* (see MM19), *Clover* (running in Kodansha's *Nakayoshi*) and *Angelic Layer*, which recently began running in *Shonen Ace*. However, Camp are notorious for confusing their readership by weaving characters and situations from previous stories into newer works. If this trend continues, fans of the Magic Knights can expect to see their favourite characters turning up in yet another world soon... ●

Rayearth is out in the UK and US from Manga Entertainment. The television series, Magic Knight Rayearth, is available in the US from Media Blasters. The manga is available from Tokyo Pop (aka Mixx).

FRIENDS OF DOROTHY?

More than one translator has come unstuck dealing with the gender politics of Clamp productions. In the Spanish version of the *Rayearth* TV series Eagle, an important male character in the second volume, was re-dubbed as a woman. This led to some confusion when Umi fell in love with him, so a 'sisterly' theme had to be hastily introduced. Rumour also has it that in Italy Nova was thought to be male, so that Eagle, whilst back to being a man, was now gay.

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Dojo Hobo

With not one but *two* anime series out now, *Ruroni Kenshin* is set to take the US by storm. But what, and who, is it really about? BEN CARTER and CATHY STERLING draw their swords, but promise not to hurt anyone...

"One hundred and forty years ago, in the unrest that followed the arrival of the Black Ships, there was a warrior in Kyoto called the Hitokiri Battousai. At the end of the bloody battles that heralded the dawn of the Meiji era, this man disappeared. As time went on, the legends grew about him, until he was known simply as 'The Strongest'. And so our tale begins, in the 11th year of the Meiji Emperor (1878), in Tokyo.... Downtown..."

Just six years ago, nobody had heard of *Ruroni Kenshin* (*Wanderings of Kenshin*) – now it's one of the hits of the anime and manga world, spawning an ongoing manga series, a television series, a video prequel and a movie. As a testament to its value, both the television and video versions are coming out in the US, from two different companies – only *Magic Knight Rayearth* has ever achieved similar attention. *Kenshin* is something of a rarity – a truly epic series which manages to stay interesting over a large number of episodes with a carefully crafted plot, likable characters and regular changes of tone and pace.

Kenshin Himura was once a killer feared throughout Japan who worked as an assassin during the civil war. Believing that the ruling Tokugawa government were weak, and that Japan would be weakened further by reliance on international trade, Kenshin's revolutionary Ishin Shishi group eventually overthrew the government and gained power. But victory was short. Soon most of the rebels had been given posts in the new government, and introduced laws that disbanded the samurai and made it illegal to wear a sword. Now, Kenshin is a wandering swordsman who has renounced his past, and vowed never to kill again. He uses a reverse-bladed sword to avoid killing people with his lethal techniques.

Above: two swords are better than one.

Kenshin falls in with Kaoru Kamiya, the daughter of a great swordmaster, whose school has fallen on hard times since the death of her father. She is hunting his killer, a man who claims to be the long-lost Hitokiri Battousai. Intrigued, Kenshin tags along (knowing that since *he* is the real one, the man must be an imposter), saving her life from a thug out to take over her school. But Kaoru is hardly grateful – she complains that Kenshin has smashed up her school during the fray, and insists that he stay to help clean things up.

A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP

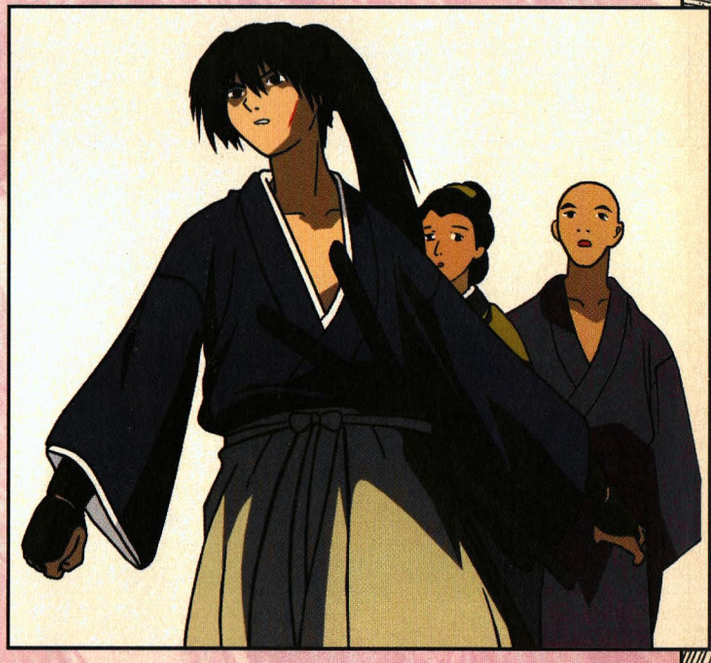
"As to whether Kaoru will become Kenshin's lover, even I haven't decided that yet," said creator Nobuhiro Watsuki in the introduction to the manga, but even he had to admit that it was only a matter of time. In a comic that was soon crawling with cool guys, as he introduced other fighters for Kenshin to team up with, Watsuki was keen to keep a female audience, and put a lot of effort into keeping Kaoru interesting. Despite carrying the can as the token cute girlie, she's as tough a cookie as one might expect to find running her own father's martial arts school. No genteel Japanese ladies here, Kaoru's hair is slung back in a pony-tail suitable for sword practise, and the only nod to her feminine side comes in Watsuki's endless obsession with changing her clothes. "Even though she's fallen on hard times," he says, "the patterns of her kimonos keep increasing, like she's dressing herself up." For Kenshin? For shame! No good will come of this – a 17-year-old orphan girl leaning on an aging swordsman for protection (yes, aging, Kenshin is an ancient 28 at the beginning of the story, despite his boyish good looks).

For Watsuki, who created *Ruroni Kenshin* in 1994, it was the bad guys who he really enjoyed doing. "The truth is, the ones I like best are Kenshin's enemies. Even worse, when I was in high school I didn't even study Japanese history," he adds, with typically overblown Japanese humility. "I know nothing about it! I'm a fake!"

THE SCIENCE BIT

US vessels under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in 1853 and forced the Japanese to open their doors to foreign trade. The resultant culture shock and unrest (the Shogun's official job title was Barbarian Destroying Supreme General, and he hardly did much destroying when he was looking down the muzzle of an American cannon) caused a civil war, the "restoration" of the Emperor, and the beginning of the modern era. So he's kind of on the right track – *Kenshin* might be taking a few liberties with the history books, but its heart is in the right place.

Kenshin himself is inspired by a real person. "Kenshin was based on the historical killer Gensai Kawakami, one of four such men in that era," says Watsuki. "At first glance, he could be taken for a woman, and he certainly appeared to be a kind man on the outside, but he was the total opposite. He was cold and calculating, said to be the most fearsome of the four killers."



In a time when extremists prided themselves on bumping off reformers, Kawakami struck down a man in broad daylight, in front of witnesses and did so with a lightning-fast sword attack. But as with all radicals, he was as much a danger to the new order as he was to the old. After the Shogun had been deposed and the new Emperor installed, Kawakami was imprisoned on trumped-up charges, and executed in 1871.

"Other than this, I didn't have any particular design for the character," continues Watsuki. "The hero of my first-ever story was a tall, dark and handsome man with black hair and armour, so I tried to draw the exact opposite and the result looked almost feminine." Scrabbling around for something to toughen up his new character, Watsuki hit on the idea of a cross-shaped scar, and Kenshin was born.

X MARKS THE PLOT

Oh yes, the scar… if you want to know where that comes from, the place to look is not the manga or the television series, but the video prequel, out now in the US under the title *Samurai* X. The four-part series tells the story of how Kenshin got his distinctive scar, why he left his life as an assassin and became a wandering swordsman. It's dark and moody – partly as a consequence of the subject matter, and partly because a video audience will put up with a little more bite than a television crowd.

The television series, on the other hand, varies quite dramatically in tone from humorous to serious and back again. In particular, where it deviates from the manga (mostly single episode stories in the first season) it tends to swing more towards comedy/romance than in the more plot-heavy episodes.

The television series comprises three separate story arcs, each of which covers a different section of the manga. The first is largely concerned with how the characters meet, and how Kenshin settles into life with Kaoru, helping to protect her from various dangers – some fairly mundane, others created by his past catching up with him. Since the action is set almost exclusively in Tokyo, this is often referred to as the "Tokyo" story arc.

The second "Kyoto" part covers Kenshin's journey to prevent a dangerous warlord from gaining enough power to rule Japan. Kenshin must face not only the warlord Makoto and his group of mercenaries, but also the discovery that, like Kenshin, Makoto was also a member of the revolutionaries.

The third story arc, "Revenge", also concerns Kenshin's past. During his revolutionary days, Kenshin was the target of a honey-trap operation, but fell in love with Tomoe, the beautiful woman sent to tease his secrets from him. He eventually married her, only to kill her under strange circumstances, which, however mitigating they may be, justifiably annoy her brother enough to send him off on a vendetta.

Above: moody adversaries.

Below, left: Kenshin in hack and slay mode.

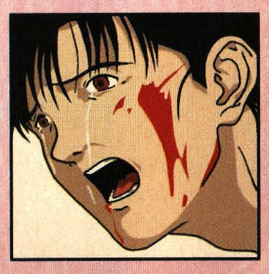
TWO MORE FOR THE ROAD

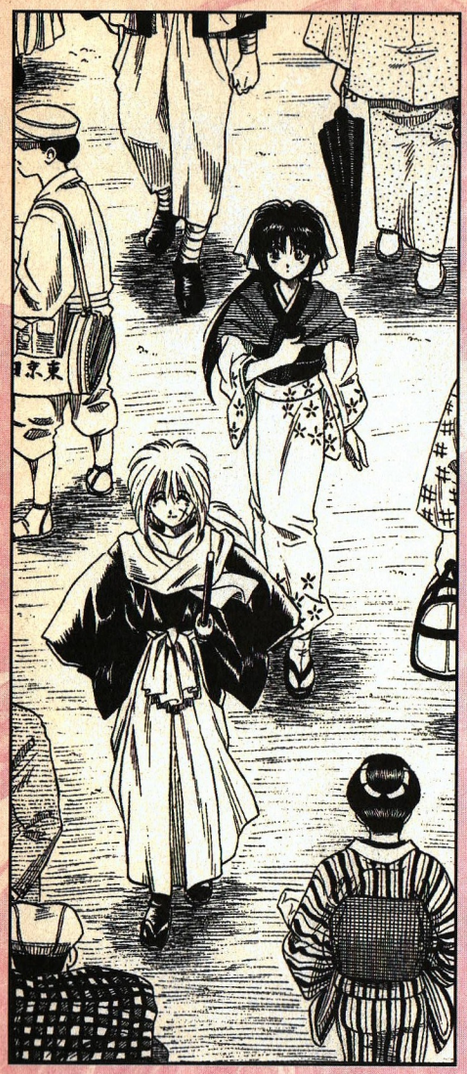
Kenshin gains some other companions in his adventures, including Yahiko, a young street urchin he catches picking his pocket. "There was no particular design motif," shrugs Watsuki. "Just that it was time for one of those tousel-haired, big-eyed boys you get in kids' comics."

As usual, we have to turn off the Modesty Generator before Watsuki starts talking straight about his creations. He admits that there's more to Yahiko than that, and claims to have based the character on himself during his school years, when he was one of the worst members of the local kendo club (there goes that Japanese modesty again). When he was 18, he only made the team once, and even then it was only after the rest of his team-members ran out of options. "That's the reason Yahiko isn't a hero," explains Watsuki. "He's a real-life person with those feelings of frustration, who wants to be bigger and stronger, who'll put their body through it all until they succeed."

The final member of the central cast is literally bad to the bone; so much so that he has "Bad" written on his shirt just in case people forget. An orphan raised by the leader of a revolutionary band, Sanosuke Sagara survived when the rest of his gang was betrayed and slain by Kenshin's former allies. Becoming a gangster in Tokyo, Sanosuke first meets Kenshin when he challenges him to a friendly duel, though Kenshin refuses. When he discovers Kenshin's past he becomes intent on revenge, and sets out to challenge Kenshin for real. Sanosuke uses a huge "Horse Cutting" sword, designed to slice mounts out from underneath their riders, to fight Kenshin, but Kenshin defeats him, cutting the blade in half. After realising that Kenshin is not like those who betrayed him, Sanosuke decides to stay with at the Kamiya dojo with him – mainly because he is never far from a good fight.

Sanosuke had his origins in another semi-historical character, the dashing revolutionary Sanosuke Harada. Reading about him in *Burning Sword*, a book by Ryotaro Shiba (one of Hayao Miyazaki's favourite authors), Watsuki discovered he was once regarded as one of the most handsome men in Japan, who fought with a giant spear, loved to fight and had a stormy temper. Requiring an "Older Brother" type for the story, Watsuki threw him in, although he carefully forgot to mention that the original inspiration was a lot fatter.





DID YOU KNOW?

When Kaoru's servant Kihei warns her off Kenshin, he says: "Vagabond is just another word for failure" – a pun likely to go down well with a large part of Kenshin's school-age audience, for whom a *ronin* is not a masterless samurai but someone who has failed their college entrance exams.

Left: Kenshin, Kaoru and Yahiko in manga mode.

Above: Kenshin and Kaoru in their early days.

K-K-KENSHIN

The chances of an Alabama artist drawing a comic about the heroic deeds of a wife-killing Ku Klux Klan member, famed for lynching equal rights supporters, turning his back on his past and trying to live a happy existence as a bouncer at a gun club with a former anarchist and a thief, might not sound like the height of political correctness, but in many ways, that would be the American equivalent of the *Kenshin* set-up. Time has healed a lot of wounds in Japan – the civil war is not discussed much these days, but it's only a short way from the good-old-days of *Kenshin* to the good-old-boys of the Japanese nationalist movement, who still enjoy singing the virtues of the samurai era, Japanese uniqueness and kicking out all the foreigners (yes, that means you).

But *Kenshin* is not a serious attempt to restore old-time Japanese values – it's a 19th century costume drama that bears more resemblance to cowboy movies than the urban revolutionaries that inspired it. Kenshin is a lone gunslinger with a dirty past, wandering into town and shacking up with a local girl, gradually assembling a group of pals and getting to know the area. Eventually, it's him and not the sheriff who makes the laws and fights the bad guys, but it's only a matter of time before his old ghosts come to haunt him. It's just one more irony that Kenshin is now being exported to America, the very nation against whose influence he fought so hard. Perhaps he'd see the funny side. ●

Rurouni Kenshin the TV series is currently released in the US by Media Blasters. The video series is out (also only in the US) from AD Vision under the title Samurai X. For a wealth of information on the series, try www.anipike.com/rkenshin.html

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POLICE
High

Amos Wong interviews *Patlabor* composer Kenji Kawai about the tricky art of putting pictures to music.

Performance

Kenji Kawai is a busy man. With the live-action film *Sakuya* barely finished and the *Corrector Yui* anime still running on Japanese television, he's already working on a new project.

"At the moment I'm scoring *Avalon*, Mamoru Oshii's new work. It's a live-action film, the final cut has been completed and the sound will be done in 6.1 digital. It's basically a science fiction story set in Poland. The music won't be that much different to my usual style, but for some sections I used the Warsaw Philharmonic. The sound is quintessentially European, I'm also using a choir. It's quite different to working in Japan. We had to record the full orchestra in a single session, which I overlaid with synthesisers."

His music for the *Patlabor* movies made him one of only a handful of Japanese composers whose work is available abroad, but he nearly missed his calling altogether. "My family aren't involved with music at all," he says. "When they found out I was interested, they actually tried to convince me not to pursue a career in music. In Japan, the status of the composer isn't really high. They were worried about my future prospects and whether I would be able to support myself."

Despite their concerns, he's since become one of the most accomplished composers in animation, with credits including television series such as *Blue Seed*; the *Devilman* videos and *Vampire Princess Miyu*.

Kawai now composes at his headquarters, AUBE Incorporated. The impressive building in southern Tokyo was constructed in 1997, it comprises his office on the ground floor and recording studio on the first. The staircase is adorned with black porcelain cats, a gift from Mamoru Oshii, with whom he has often worked over the years.

His interest in his craft began at school. "I started playing guitar in a band during high school and received some classical training. When I was 20 I wanted to become a guitarist, but quit the class and taught myself. It's not that I didn't like their teaching methods or anything," he adds. "I just always got tired of things easily!

"I originally studied nuclear physics, but dropped out. I started writing music for commercials a long time ago; one thing led to another and I began composing for animation. It didn't feel very dramatic, like 'I'd found my true calling', but I did realise that it was the right thing for me to do."

Above: *Ghost in the Shell* – tone is where the heart is.

FLYING BLIND

Even so, the art has its fair share of challenges, as in the case of writing for *Blue Seed* and television series in general. "First of all, I don't have any completed footage for reference when I compose," he explains. "The script and storyboards are available, but even storyboards may only be half-complete; they're my only guide. Its difficult to write for action scenes this way; exactly what kind of action is going on? What will be suitable?"

On top of that is the timeframe. "Within two to four weeks I have to write between 60 to 100 tracks. It's quite difficult, especially when the series isn't completed yet, so the recording will be split into two sessions. If I'm good friends with the director, there are cases where I'll write new tracks as the series progresses, but they're all usually written in that initial period."

Having to compose for the climax of a series while the final episode is yet to be animated certainly sounds daunting, but luckily the process isn't just a one-man job. "There's a sound director who creates a music menu," Kawai explains. "The tracks are listed as M1, M2 etc and he'll describe what kind of scene a track number represents. For instance, M1 might be a sad scene, M2 a happy scene and so on."

He adds that even with a large scale animated movie there's no images to work with, despite a more generous working period of up to three months. "The animation and music production happens at the same time, but there is a timecode that specifies the duration of scenes and cuts. From this information, I can write pieces that match the action."

Also important is input from the feature's director. "At first he'll explain the kind of atmosphere he has in mind and we'll set some ideas. If there's time, I may come back with a rough demo and we'll discuss it further, but that's rare for TV series.

"Composing and arranging is the hardest," he admits, while "the actual performance part is my favourite." His work also encompasses live action movies, such as the popular horror series *Ring*. In these instances, the final cut of the movie is available for him to score music to. "Of course, I prefer working this way," he laughs, "as sometimes there's problems working without images."

The top priority for any piece lies in establishing the main melody. "Generally I use the synthesiser," he says. "Afterwards I'll layer that with harmonies, for which I may choose strings, a chorus, brass section or woodwind instruments. I have to work within different budgets all the time and it affects how many performers I can use for the various arrangements, like with the string section for example."

The approach is slightly different for songs, which he's done on occasion. "The singer is normally already chosen and I have to consider the performer's vocal range to set the key, as well as adjust the melody to allow for the performer's breathing while singing."

PHANTOM MENACES

Recently finished on Japanese television was Xebec's giant robot series *Dai Gard*, in which Kawai collaborated with Kohei Tanaka, composer for *Gunbuster*, *Dragon Half* and *Sakura Wars*. "We divided the music between us. Mr Tanaka worked on all the good pieces from the music menu and I got the leftovers," he laughs. "But I thought it was the best choice for our musical styles."

Kawai excels in tense, atmospheric pieces full of menace. The best example being in *Patlabor* 2, when the JSDF brace for an aerial attack by incoming unidentified jet fighters, only to discover at the last moment that it's a false alarm. The fact that the suspenseful sequence is largely conveyed visually by blips on a radar screen is testament to his expertise. Kawai answers modestly about his achievement.

"At first the director [Mamoru Oshii] had some ideas. He wanted a steady double-bass rhythm and I just expanded on that and added the melody and other arrangements." He does admit that since scoring that movie, other directors have approached him specifically to write something similar for their works, most notably in *You're Under Arrest: The Movie*, which sounds on occasion like *Patlabor* played at 78 rpm. "Perhaps the music from *Patlabor* 2 has become to be known as my style now."

The same assumption applies to his score to Hideo Nakata's live-action *Ring*. Much of the suspense in *Ring* comes from playback of a "cursed" video cassette, which Kawai exploits with samples of the demonic moans one hears when spooling slowly in an editing suite. As with *Ghost in the Shell*, the music for Ring is evocative and spine-tingling, but taken out of context, it hardly sounds musical at all. Kawai is that most noble of media composers, someone who is prepared to write work that genuinely complements a film, and is lost without it.

When asked about what technological developments he considers to have been important in the industry he replies that "The biggest change has been in the switch from analogue to digital tape recording. I don't have hard disk recording facilities in my studio, so I just use digital tape." He doesn't use computers and composing software such as Qbase, preferring older style

Kenji Kawai
Selected Works

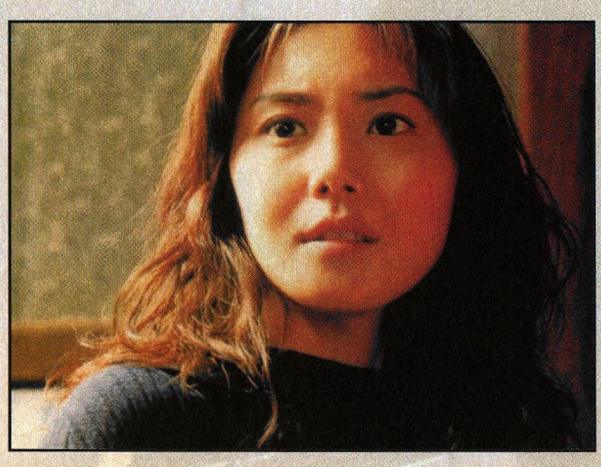
Ghost in the Shell
Devilman
Twilight Q
Patlabor series
Let's Hear it for the Ancestors
Vampire Princess Miyu
Dark Myth
Urusei Yatsura vs Maison Ikkoku
Musashi Road
Samurai Pizza Cats
Project A-ko: The Versus
Exper Zenon
Wolf Guy
Blue Seed
Corrector Yui
You're Under Arrest: The Movie
Ring
Ring 2

sequencers. His beautifully-finished studio contains, alongside a plethora of equipment, classic analogue synthesisers, cabinets of sound modules as well as the ubiquitous sampler.

"I do enjoy sampling, but its quite time-consuming," he says. "I use factory presets but I also sample when I have the time. In one case, a director was really tired after returning from Saipan and was sleeping in the studio. I stuck a mic to a stick, reached over and sampled his snoring!"

Perhaps his most well known work is *Ghost in the Shell*, with its beautiful and haunting opening track. Spartan and atmospheric in parts to the point where it could as easily be compared to pieces by famed ambient composers Brian Eno, David Sylvian or Harold Budd, Kawai has surprisingly not heard of them. "There's lots of composers that I like, but my favourites would have to be Burt Bacharach, Dave Grushin (*On Golden Pond*), Carole King, Santana and George Delereux.

Instead, most of the input on *Ghost in the Shell* came from Oshii himself. "At first Oshii wanted to use *taiko* drums," Kawai explains. "He was after a big drum sound, from which audiences would find difficult to place its country of origin. After that was established, I thought it would be a bit simple, so I suggested adding a chorus to it. A few weeks before that discussion, I worked with some *minyo* – traditional Japanese folk-song vocalists. In Europe you have a choir, but that's never the case with *minyo*, they're always solo. But I'd listened to the *Bulgarian Voices* [released in UK in the 1980s under the record label 4AD] and I thought I could do something similar, so I asked the *minyo* performers to give it a go. It's the first time they'd sung as a chorus."



The soundtrack also marked a rare occasion where Kawai would write accompanying words. "The lyrics are in Japanese, but it's a very old dialect from around the Heian period. That was over 1,000 years ago, we can't understand it. I had to go to the library for research and it took quite a long time. But in written form, it still uses the same kanji characters.

"Oshii has said that sound is vital in order to reinforce the reality of his work's world view. Regarding the music of *Ghost in the Shell*, he doesn't always believe that if there's an action scene, the music has to be loud and energetic in order to heighten the action. In the action sequences involving Major Kusanagi, he wanted to musically portray what she feels in her heart whilst fighting."

For Kawai, music directly stemming from thoughts would be a dream come true. Discounting the uses of *Ghost in the Shell*'s high technology for warfare and espionage, he laughs and says he'd prefer something a lot more artistic – "I'd love to be able to attach a cord to my head so I could directly transfer my ideas to music!" ●

Thanks to Masami Takahashi for interpreting. *Ghost in the Shell* has just been re-released on DVD from Manga Entertainment, and the *Patlabor* movies are following shortly. Kawai's soundtracks to both are available on CD. *Ring* is out soon in the UK from Tartan Video.

Above: *Patlabor* has "come to be known as my style now."

Left: Ghosts in the machine in *Ring*

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RENEGADE MASTER

As a retrospective on Mitsuteru Yokoyama's work is published in Japan, LEE-BRIMMICOMBE-WOOD and MOTOKO TAMAMURO examine manga's unsung master.

With only a handful of translators working in the trade, Western perceptions of manga (and their animated offspring) are filtered through a linguistic bottleneck. No wonder we often fail to get the big picture. The meanest manga fan has heard of Osamu Tezuka, the seminal genius of Japanese comics. But how many are familiar with Mitsuteru Yokoyama, every bit as versatile and gigantic a figure?

Like Tezuka, Yokoyama has produced influential works in almost every area, and was one of the inventors of the giant robot and magical girl genres. His epic works, spanning more than 45 years, have created an industry of books, animation and merchandise, making Yokoyama a comics giant, hitherto overlooked by the West.

Above: *Command J.*

Right: Iron Man 28 gets crabby.

Born in 1934 in Kobe, the eldest of four brothers, Yokoyama began drawing cartoons in junior high school. There, he discovered *Metropolis*, by Osamu Tezuka. "Tezuka is my greatest influence. *Metropolis* made me want to draw comics. He knew science and created stories no one had ever done before. It made me want to study and create stories like him." *Metropolis*, which contained an early prototype of Tezuka's iconic Astro Boy character, remains a favourite. "[It is] the best of all Tezuka works. I love the scene in which [Astro Boy] is melting to his death. As he is artificial, it is a brilliant idea."

Yokoyama began to submit stories to manga magazines during high school, but with little success. Graduating in 1953, he entered a succession of office jobs and ended up in movie publicity. Proximity to films helped him hone his craft. "I would learn storytelling, set-ups and characters from it," he says. While working in the office by day, Yokoyama was still turning out comics in his spare time and 1955 saw his professional debut with *Silent Sword*, a rental library comic published by Tokodo. Later that year he had his first serial, *The March of the White Lily*, appear in Kobunsha's girls' magazine, *Shojo*. "Many other male artists did girls' comics back then," he says.

IRON MAN

In 1956, when Yokoyama moved to Tokyo, the July issue of *Shonen* magazine launched the greatest of his creations: *Tetsujin 28* (*Iron Man 28*). One of the first and greatest giant robot stories, the eponymous Iron Man was a super-weapon created by the Imperial Japanese government in World War Two to hold the Allies at bay. US bombs destroyed the weapons lab and all was forgotten, but after the war, a gang of masked villains discover the robot and complete the project. The barrel-shaped Tetsujin 28 is remote-controlled, and so is 'evil' or 'good' depending on who controls it. Eventually, its original inventors, Doctors Kaneda and Shikashima, and Kaneda's son, Shotaro, recover the remote control unit and use the robot as a force for peace.

Tetsujin 28 ran until May 1966, and was an enormous hit, sparking spin-offs such as two radio dramas in 1959 and 1978, a 1960 NTV live-action drama series, and three anime series in 1963, 1980 and 1998. The earliest of these TV animations was syndicated in America in 1966 under the name *Gigantor*. *Tetsujin 28* created a merchandising industry with an insatiable demand for toys based on the robot.

The strip that created this excitement is itself enormously entertaining. Yokoyama draws in a rounded, clear-line style that is pure Tezuka in influence. He never entirely lost this quintessential manga style, even when he later changed it to draw more

mature drama. Yokoyama's layouts are big and bold and bowl the reader along. His dynamic action style fills the page with energy. This is boys' comics as they should be, with little Shotaro directing his massive metal pal to defeat high-tech enemies.

Though Yokoyama would return to giant robots again, such as the *Astro Boy* homage *Thunder Boy* (1962), *Iron Samson* (1962), *The Green Devil* (1965) and *Great Thunder* (1971), it

wouldn't be until *Giant Robo* in 1967 that he would again create a robot sensation.

Yokoyama had tried to revive the dynamic of *Tetsujin 28* in the series *Deimos* (1973-75). Here, the Deimos robot was controlled psychically rather than with a remote. But *Giant Robo* was the real thing: a story about a 12 year-old boy, Daisaku Kusama, who controls the Egyptian-looking GR-1 robot, built as a weapon by a gang of evil geniuses known as Big Fire. Daisaku helps the International Police Organisation defend the world and its source of energy against Big Fire and their fierce robots GR-2 and GR-3. Running only for a year, the strip nevertheless spun off a live-action drama which ran from 1968-69.

In the West, however, *Giant Robo* is best known for the seven volume video series that Bandai produced from 1992-1998. In this epic, many characters from Yokoyama's other works appear, including personalities and robots from strips as diverse as *The Water Margin*, *Little Witch Sally* and *Mars*.

GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS

Yokoyama is an enormously prolific manga artist. "I managed my work systematically, with the help of my assistants," he says. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, commitments to weekly and monthly magazines meant that he was often producing six titles at a time. "I never got fed up doing it, even if I had to work through the night." Because of his production rate, and the high profile that *Tetsujin 28* gave him, he was able to experiment in a variety of genres. "I always want to do subjects I haven't done before," he says of his genre-hopping. "Publishers prefer popular genres, but I get fed up with them. So I say to them I'll do it if they let me do something else."

In 1958, he returned to girls' comics with a romance entitled *Red Rose, Black Rose*, about a knight saving a beauty who has been sold to the devil by her avaricious father. This was followed in *Ribon* magazine in 1959 by the series *Naughty Angel*, a story for elementary school girls about the cute young Emi, who has to learn to live with her siblings and newly-acquired stepmother after a tragedy. Emi was a favourite of Yokoyama's because, "the main character was not a cry-baby", and in 1961 the series was turned into a television drama.

However, Yokoyama was to have an even bigger girls' comics hit in 1966 with the creation of *Little Witch Sunny*, one of the first 'magical girl' stories. Sunny, a princess in her magical country, goes to live with humans to observe them, in spite of the opposition of her parents. She goes to school, makes friends and gets up to all sorts of magical mischief. The bright simplicity of the strip soon brought in animation money, though for the television show and strip the character's name had to be changed from Sunny (the trademark of Nissan's popular car) to Sally. The *Little Witch Sally* anime was a landmark: one of the first ever animated shows for girls and ran from December 1966 to 1968. The character was revived for a further series from 1989-1991.

But even this was not the last girls' comics success for Yokoyama. In 1967 *Lady Comet* debuted in *Weekly Margaret* magazine. The eponymous lady is the mysterious yet pretty housekeeper for two brothers, Takeshi and Kijo Kawagoe. In a scenario that resembles the US sitcom *Bewitched*, it soon turns out she is a witch from Planet Beta who can create and solve all sorts of problems with her magic wand. *Lady Comet* transferred to television and ran from 1967 to 1968 with Yumiko Kokonoe in the lead role. Though it was a live-action series, each episode began with a novelty section, sometimes puppetry and sometimes cel animation from future *Ranma 1/2* director Tsutomu Shibayama

Above: Creeping death in *Giant Robo*.

Left: A finger of fun in *Little Witch Sunny*.

Above: Shades of Akira in *Mars*.

Right: Hello Petal, it's *Kagemaru of Iga*.

MISSION TO MARS

Despite his successes with girls' comics, Yokoyama remained associated with boys' titles. Again, he flitted from genre to genre, his work taking in crime-fighting vigilantes (*Red Mask*, 1958), 007-influenced spy fiction (*Command J*, 1965), motor sports (*Grand Prix Boy*, 1966), jungle stories (*One-Eyed Ann*, 1968), school drama (*Rowdy Tendo* 1974) and horror (*Zone of the Evil Spirit*, 1972). But it was the science fiction for which he remains best known.

Adventures such as *Boy Rocket Team* (1960) dealt with a UFO menace and *Spaceship Red Shark* (1965) concerned a boy space cadet who becomes the lone survivor of a plague-hit mission to Titan. The popular *Adventure of Goro* (1959-62) was a time-travel saga. However, it is the stories about extrasensory talents best showcase Yokoyama's pulp-cosmic imagination.

Yokoyama's first ESP story was *Earth #V-7* (1968) in *Weekly Shonen Sunday*, about a psychic secret agent sent to defeat an evil emperor who has taken over Earth's colony on Mars. Better known in the West is *Babel II* (1971), which began with a red-haired junior high school student, Koichi, dreaming of the biblical Tower of Babel. An enormous mechanical bird takes him to the tower, where he discovers a computer, built by an alien named Babel, that begins to educate him in his paranormal abilities. With the help of his followers Koichi, now renamed Babel II, treks to the Himalayas to defeat an enemy psychic named Yomi.

Babel II was later animated for television in 1973, starring Akira Kamiya, the future *Fist of the North Star*, as Koichi. Koichi was to return in *His Name is No.101*, published in *Shonen Champion* in 1977. In this series, Yomi resurfaces and uses samples of Koichi's blood to create an army of evil psychics which he must hunt down and exterminate.

Mars, which started in *Weekly Shonen Champion* in 1976, has many superficial similarities with *Babel II*. A Koichi lookalike named Mars is an alien psychic super-weapon, designed to destroy the Earth when humanity becomes too technologically advanced. He is found on Akino island and activated 100 years too early. When the aliens order him to destroy the Earth, he refuses and helps the planet defend against the monolithic, godlike aliens instead. This story was animated as *Godmars* in 1981.

EPIC HISTORY

In his later life, Yokoyama began to concentrate on historical stories. "I liked historical novels, so it was quite easy to start," he said. His first, and most famous historical drama was *Kagemaru of Iga*, which appeared in *Weekly Shonen Sunday* in 1961. This was a new departure for Yokoyama – his first title in the new weekly magazines. Kagemaru is a boy ninja working for a general,

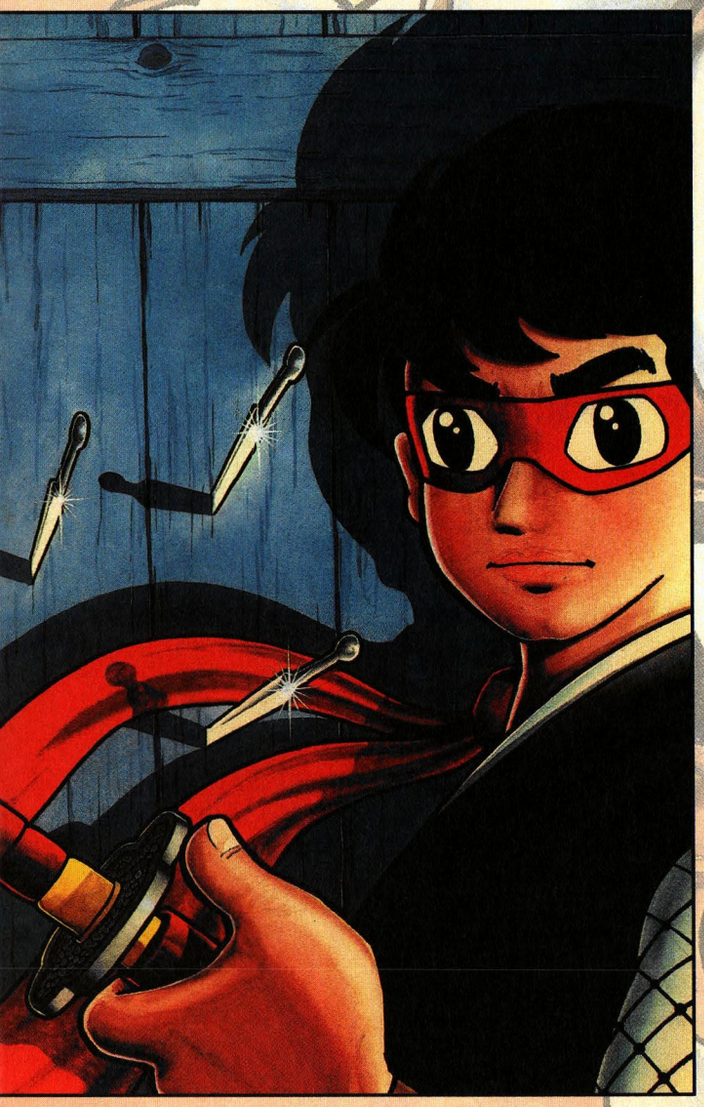
helping to crush a rebellion against his master. It may be no coincidence that Yokoyama's Kagemaru shares the same name as the hero of Sanpei Shirato's *Manual of Ninja Martial Arts* (MM10), which was first published in 1959. The main difference is in the audience – Shirato's being a comic for older readers, while Yokoyama's style played to schoolchildren.

"When I started it," says Yokoyama of the series, "it was the time when period dramas were out of fashion and SF stories flourished. I was fed up with SF and started *Kagemaru* against the editor's will. In the end, because there were no period dramas in any other magazines, it was a novelty." *Kagemaru of Iga*

remains in print to this day. An attempt to run another Yokoyama strip, *Space Police Force*, in its place caused a clamour and *Kagemaru* was restored to the magazine, eventually spinning off into a live-action film, a puppet series and a television picture-story show. Along with *Manual of Ninja Martial Arts*, *Kagemaru* kicked off a boom in stories about Japan's legendary assassins, and is cited as being one of the seminal works that established the myth of superhuman ninja abilities.

Another boy ninja series, *Red Shadow the Masked Ninja*, immediately followed *Kagemaru* and ran until 1967, when it was immediately picked up as a live-action series. 20 years later, original fans were able to share it with their children, as the series returned in anime form, directed by Susumu Ishizaki. A tale from Japan's civil war of a young boy who disguises himself to fight the evil Cult of the Golden Eye, it featured enchanted swords, beautiful female assassins and colour-coded ninja (such as the White Shadow and the unfortunate Blue Shadow) – even in the 1960s, ninja tales were hardly presented as historical, true-to-life tales. It also featured an early acting job for Toshio Furukawa as the Red Shadow – in later life, this respected actor would play Leon McNicol in *AD Police*, the eponymous *Crying Freeman* and even *Lupin III*. The hapless Blue Shadow was voiced by Masako Nozawa, who has had very little time to do anything except play *Dragon Ball*'s Son Goku in recent years.

Of all Yokoyama's historical works, the greatest of them all is his adaptation of the Chinese classic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which ran from 1972 to 1987. Before he began *Three Kingdoms*, he had already completed an adaptation of *The Water Margin*, which was adapted in the fondly-remembered NHK television series (see MM7). *Three Kingdoms*' story of intrigue was considered too vast and complex for any artist to capture in its entirety as a comic. But Yokoyama did just that in an incredible



60-volume adaptation that was to eventually sell more than 50 million copies and interest a whole generation of young Japanese in Chinese history. Animated versions of *Three Kingdoms* would appear in 1985, and from 1991. Meanwhile, Yokoyama himself would, as an 'historical expert', travel to China for a television documentary in 1985.

Above: A fine romance for the *Three Kingdoms*.

Left: Red Shadow, the lone ranger.

From 1980 onward, Yokoyama's work was mainly historically-based – worthy accounts of famous figures from Japanese history. This began with his 23-volume version of the life of Tokugawa Ieyasu, followed by Oda Nobunaga in 1985, Date Masamune in 1986, Takeda Shingen in 1987 and Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1989. Of these works, Yokoyama says, "the hardest thing was and is the research. Every time I excavate, I find new factors that change the whole of history."

Now in his mid-sixties, Yokoyama is still working, in spite of a two year break in the 1990s following a heart attack. His only other vice, aside from smoking in defiance of doctor's orders ("Am I a fossil?" he asks. "I want to live dangerously!"), is the races. Ever since an editor interested him in the racetrack, he has been a punter and now even owns his own stable of horses. But he continues to work on manga stories, and shows no sign of stopping yet. This giant of comics continues to influence many artists. Though when reminded of this, he replies: "I've been in the manga world too long!" ●

Mitsuteru Yokoyama The Complete, is published in Japan by Soft Garage.

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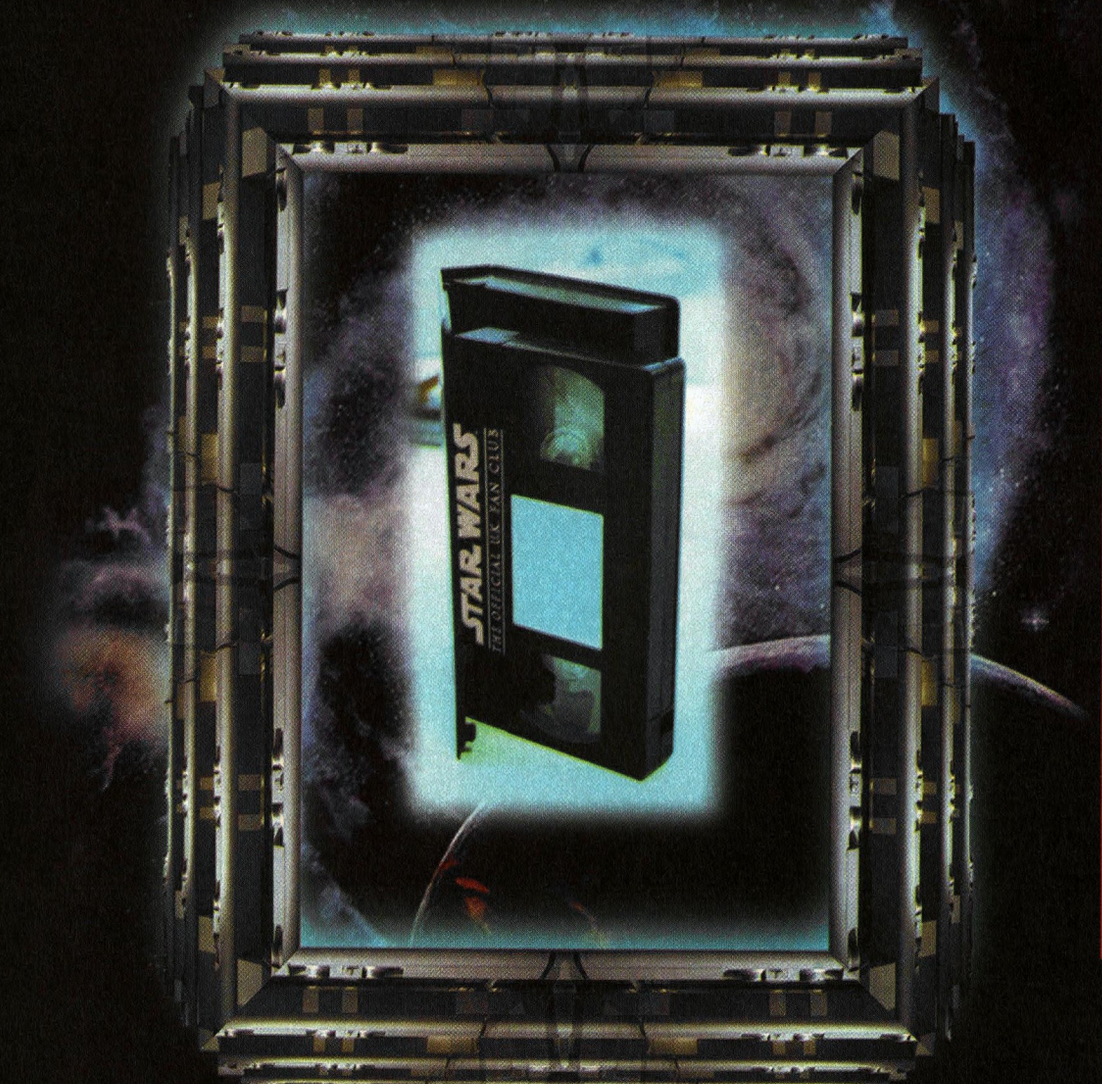

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Salary

Lee Brimmicombe-Wood and Motoko Tamamuro on the history of Kenshi Hirokane's Division

As shown by the release of *Division Chief Kosaku Shima* in a new bilingual edition, Japanese comics are far more diverse than the glut of juvenile product in the West suggests. But *Kosaku Shima* isn't designed for Western audiences. Like Kodansha's *New Kindaichi* murder mysteries (MM16) and the fabulous teaching saga *GTO* (MM15), these Japanese/English translations are designed to help Japanese readers improve their English. The upside for the Western fan is a glimpse of genres and creators as yet undiscovered.

Kosaku Shima is an archetypal salaryman's comic, taken from Kodansha's weekly *Morning* magazine, and created by modern master Kenshi Hirokane. Its hero is a 40-something advertising head in a major Japanese corporation. He is intimately involved with the day-to-day management of the company and has to pitch into boardroom battles and industrial intrigue. But in spite of his age, he's still a youthful go-getter and a magnet for beautiful women, including his 25 year-old girlfriend, Kumiko Omachi.

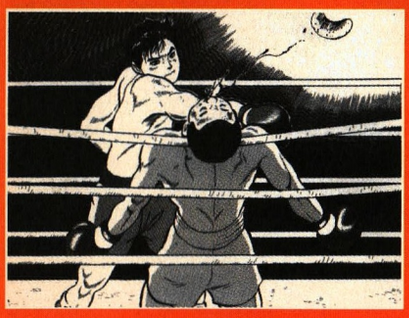
BRAND EXTENSION

Kodansha's release brings Western readers into a long-established story. It is a continuation of the enormously successful *Section Chief Kosaku Shima*, which debuted in *Morning* in 1985. In these early stories, Shima is married (though separated), with a daughter, and holds the lowly rank of Section Chief *[so I gathered – Ed.]*. He's in charge of four staff at the headquarters of Hatsushiba Electric, a fictional manufacturer with more than a passing resemblance to electronics giants Sony and Matsushita. His role within the advertising section is to manage Hatsushiba's showrooms throughout Japan, but in the first stories he is reassigned to the corporation's New York offices. Here, he encounters an alien world, brasher and tougher than Tokyo. He begins a relationship with a woman named Irene, who works

Manga

convoluted

Chief Kosaku Shima.

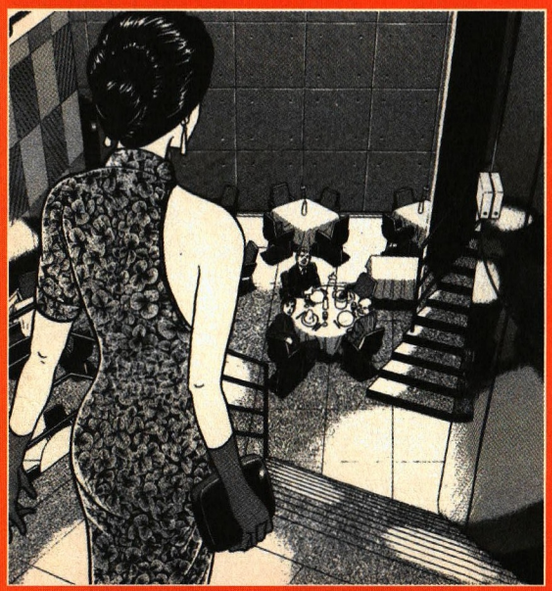


Above: From boxing to bonking; it's all in a day's work for Kosaku Shima.

for the marketing agency hired by Hatsushiba. He also meets a man who becomes important in later life: Yusuke Oizumi, the head of the New York office.

From the very start, Kenshi Hirokane's fantasy of salaryman life is tinted with autobiography. After college he worked for Matsushita Electronics in their Sales Promotion Division – the same work as Shima. Working with designers on advertising campaigns, Hirokane decided that he wanted to be an artistic craftsman too and decided to become a comics artist. The final push came when Matsushita ordered him to go to New York for two years. Seeing this as a brake on his ambitions, Hirokane quit his job to draw comics. The early experiences of Shima in the Big Apple represent the corporate life Hirokane never had, while other story-lines, such as that of Shima's transfer to a subsidiary record company, are based on the experiences of former colleagues.

Below: Wining and dining in the high-class business world.



WARFARE STRATEGIES

Kosaku Shima is a chance for Hirokane to expound much of his personal philosophy. He admits that Shima is based on him and his way of life. In his book *Tomorrow Will Take Care of Itself*, Hirokane holds up Shima as a role model for young office workers. Shima follows Hirokane's three basic rules of not comparing oneself to others; enjoying oneself, whatever comes; and being optimistic.

More curious are Hirokane's ideas on women and marriage. By the time Shima reaches New York, his wife is divorcing him, but he is unfazed. He tells Irene that he doesn't love his wife, although she and his daughter are still important to him. He's free to love other women. This tortuous double-think lets Shima sleep around, first with Irene, then on his return to Tokyo with Oizumi's mistress, Noriko Umashima – blessed irony, since his boss has asked Shima to "keep an eye" on Noriko and ensure she doesn't go astray. However, Shima's real love turns out to be young Kumiko Omachi, initially a worker in his section, dating another of his employees. After Shima's divorce, Kumiko ditches her old boyfriend for him.

Kumiko is attractive and outgoing, though she has a secret. As the triangle between Kumiko, her boyfriend and her boss explodes, she reveals she is secretly the illegitimate daughter of Mr Yoshihara, the founder of Hatsushiba Electric. Her mother, Iko, had been screwing Yoshihara and current chairman Kino on the side. Kumiko discovered this in her teens and it left her with some odd ideas about sex.

MARKET FORCES

Shima is flattered by the attention of such a vibrant young woman. Particularly one prone to turn up unannounced and demand exciting sex at the drop of a hat. Occasionally, he feels insecure about the relationship, but a Hirokane hero knows that girls take second place to work. In *Tomorrow Will Take Care of Itself*, he exhorts all salarymen to follow the example of Shima – "Take any

Above: He wants to be a part of it – Shima in New York.

work that comes up, even on your girlfriend's birthday. You should explain it to her. And if you fail to persuade her, dump her". Charming, though it never stopped Hirokane marrying artist Fumi Saimon (creator of the 'Office Lady' manga *Girl Friend*) and having two kids.

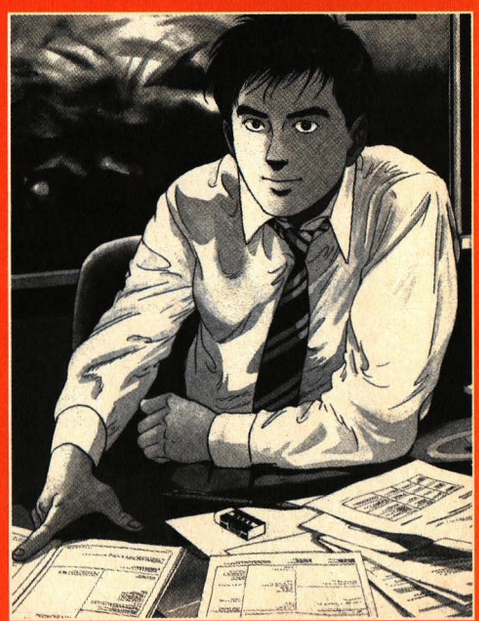
His experiences at Matsushita left Hirokane distrustful of corporations. "Don't depend on the Company," he advises young office workers. "Companies have looked after you from cradle to grave in the past, but now the situation is changing. Don't sacrifice yourself for the Company." Like many Japanese of his generation, Hirokane is fascinated by the power of group effort. But he is also taken with the idea of the individualist, the leader, and what such a person can achieve managing a group. Kosaku Shima is just such a 'lone wolf' manager, and the biggest story arc in *Section Chief* concerns his involvement with an electrifying boardroom battle.

HOSTILE TAKEOVER

The CEO of Hatsushiba, Tomabechi, attempts to recruit the up and coming Shima to his boardroom faction. However, Shima takes the advice of his creator – "Stand up to your boss. Don't be afraid to be sacked." Doubting Shima's commitment, Tomabechi sacks him, and so Shima embarks on an attempt to get his post back by toppling Tomabechi. This involves manipulating his former New York boss Oizumi into the top spot. And so begins a story of clandestine dealings; attempting to discover those people and factions who control the most voting stock in the company, and persuading them to bring down Tomabechi. Unsurprisingly, Kumiko's mother Iko turns out to be one of the major stockholders, as does Oizumi's mistress, Noriko. Both of these strong, independent women, along with Kumiko, become players in the battle between Oizumi and Tomabechi.

Shima, financially supported by allies, jets around gathering support. Part of Hirokane's high-powered business fantasy is the establishment of a milieu filled with the finer things in life. Hirokane is a wine connoisseur, so a lot of negotiations take place in high-class restaurants and hotel rooms. He also has an abiding love of Western music, and the lyrics from Cole Porter musicals, jazz standards and lounge hits litter the stories. This soap opera doesn't have anything like the glitz of *Dallas* or *Dynasty* – Hirokane's solid plotting and down to Earth touches keep it *this* side of believable – but wine, women and song are an essential part of the series' appeal.

Below: Things are going to change around here... Fact!



In the boardroom maneuverings, Shima finds an ally in his former boss, Kiichi Nakazawa. Nakazawa is a man of integrity, an incorruptible 'lone wolf' like Shima, and a snapshot of how Hirokane views his hero 10 years from now. He aids Shima in publicising Hatsushiba's abuses of the fair trading laws, resulting in a consumer boycott of the company's goods. Shima also has the help of one of Iko's

former lovers, Chairman Kino, who coerces Tomabechi's supporters with threats and bribes and secures his downfall.

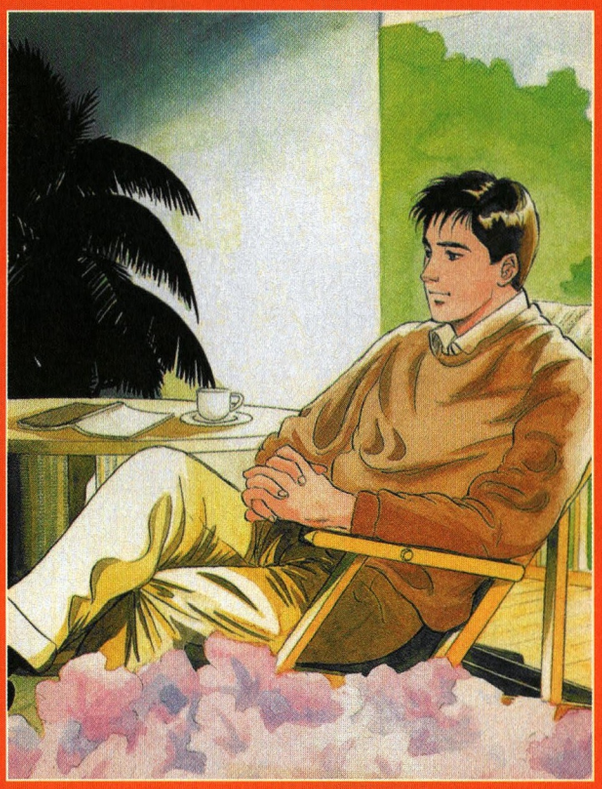
In the wake of the battle, Oizumi is promoted to company president and reinstates Shima. However, Oizumi soon resigns due to ill health and takes a back seat as the new company chairman. Untouched by the fallout from the infighting, Kiichi Nakazawa becomes CEO and at Shima becomes head of the Advertising Division. However, the fighting also costs Shima personally, as Kumiko leaves to join Hatsushiba's movie-making subsidiary, Cosmos Studios, in Los Angeles. They carry on a strained long-distance relationship.

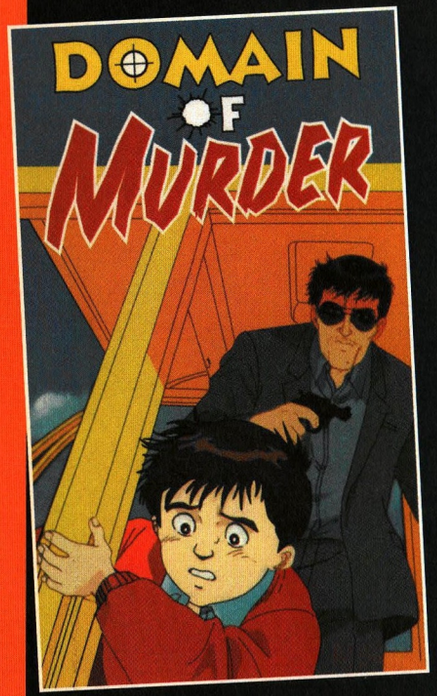
RELAUNCH, REBRAND, REPLAY

With Shima receiving a promotion it was natural that the comic should be repackaged, this time as *Division Chief Kosaku Shima*, which first appeared in 1995. Essentially a continuation of the old story, Shima is now firmly placed in the highest echelons of Hatsushiba. No longer an ambitious underling, he is the boss of the Advertising Division, and also a troubleshooter for Kiichi Nakazawa. The underlying theme of *Division Chief* is responsibility in corporate life, and the stories are filled with small essays on management and ethical conduct, with their backdrop a post-bubble Japan in economic decline. In one story Shima establishes a program to enhance Hatsushiba's environmental credentials. In another he helps one of Hatsushiba's subcontractor beat off a hostile takeover by asset strippers. Again, Hirokane generates page-turners out of seemingly unpromising material.

Division Chief Kosaku Shima panders to its salaryman audience with its tale of executive life and love. But it is a finely-crafted piece of work, full of beautiful observation, both in the writing and visuals. This fantasy of corporate Japan is rooted in a mundane suburban reality. One in which family men push their daughters' heads down into a respectful bow, and in which men who have given their life to the company collapse in tears when they are 'downsized' out of the corporation. It's a view of a real world you'll never see in any other translated manga, and is infinitely more rewarding. ●

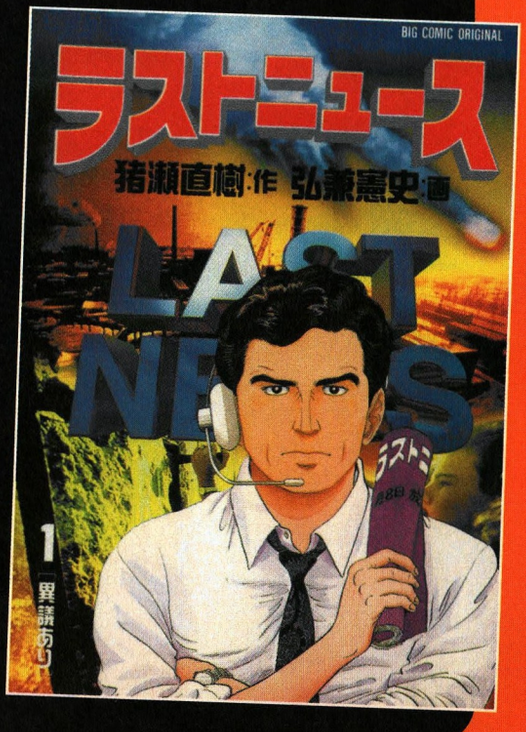
***Division Chief Kosaku Shima* is out now from Kodansha International.**





HIROKANE'S HITS

Kosaku Shima was an enormous hit for Hirokane, eclipsing his earlier successes with the short story series *Human Scramble* and the gritty private eye thriller *Hello Hedgehog* (animated as *Domain of Murder*). *Section Chief* was a mature, adult story; very matter-of-fact in its portrayal of business and sex, and which drew parallels between them. With the exception of the Clooney-like Shima, Hirokane's characters have the virtue of being believably ordinary folks. This realism was something which Hirokane would exploit again, in his professional drama *Last News*, about a television news producer, based on a novel by Naoki Inose; in *Kaji Ryusuke Proposes...*, about Kagoshima politician who intends to reform Japanese politics; and *Shooting Stars in the Twilight*, a series of contemporary stories for mature folks (see MM6). Though an episode of *Hello Hedgehog* had been made into an anime (*Domain of Murder*), the much bigger *Kosaku Shima* was turned into a live-action television series and movie.



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US ANIME

Spaceship Agga Ruter

Format: VHS, sub/dub, NTSC
Directors: Shigeru Yazaki
Duration: 60 mins
Certficate: unrated
Price: $14.99
Distributor: Anime 18
Reviewer: Cathy Sterling
Rating: ★★★

"Dammit, Janis!" The evil Shiunk kills Taiyo's parents and leaves him to die in space. Rescued by the kindly android Kei and taken aboard her ship, the *Agga Ruter*, Taiyo is raised without human companionship for 15 years. Telling him to call her Mother (Ewww!), Kei teaches him how to be a sex-machine in bed. When captured by the space pirate Janis, the pair prove to be perkily co-operative hostages, volunteering to cook and clean, rummaging in her underwear drawer and reading out the funny bits from her diary.

Janis is a descendant of Re-Formed Humans, ancient members of the Fighter civilisation who recombined their DNA to survive on hostile worlds. Though she appears human, she turns into a savage were-tiger when reminded of abuse at the hands of her circus ringmaster stepfather. Endowed with superhuman strength and bedroom prowess, Taiyo is the only man who can satisfy her, and she agrees to help him and his "Mother". The *Agga Ruter*, itself a Fighter relic, lacks a vital bit of kit, which has been mistaken for a precious gem and put on display within the Millennium Mule cruise liner. The gang sneak in to steal it, and Taiyo soon works his charms on the female captain.

"From the creative genius behind *Tenchi Muyo*," yells the blurb, with Masaki Kajishima taking the credit for supervising, designing and writing this 1998 farce. Since it was actually directed by Shigeru Yazaki, designed by Kenji Teraoka and written by Hideyuki Kurata, some might say the man's genius was having the balls to stride into a room full of producers and say: "What about a nice guy, obsessed with his mother, hanging around with a space pirate and then finding out that he's the heir to an ancient civilisation? And we'll throw in a new girl each episode as well, just to keep people watching. And they'll all fight about who gets to marry him. Brilliant. Yes, thanks, I'll take cash."

Even the humour is strangely familiar, with Kei setting up a mock Japanese living room on the bridge of Janis's warship in order to teach her how to be a good cook. With *Pretty Sammy* hooking the girls and *Tenchi in Tokyo* nabbing the remaining teenage fans, *Agga Ruter* is another piece of the franchise – a porno *Tenchi* in all but name. Sadly, as an Anime 18 production, the dub doesn't quite merit the effort accorded Kajishima's *Photon* by sister company USMC, so the script creaks in places. But in playing like a sexed-up *Sol Bianca*, it's one clever way to wring every last penny out of your faithful followers. Maybe Kajishima is a genius after all. ●

Trigun #1

Format: DVD, sub/dub, Region 1 (also VHS, sub/dub, NTSC)
Director: Satoshi Nishimura
Duration: 100 mins.
Certificate: unrated
Price: DVD $29.98, VHS $29.98/$24.98
Distributor: Pioneer
Reviewer: Fred Patten
Rating: ★★★

Trigun will consist of eight videos/DVDs encompassing 26 episodes. Based upon the manga by *Samurai Shodown* artist Yasuhiro Nightow, it combines science fiction with Westerns; comedy with drama. This first video establishes the comedy, set on a faraway planet whose society mirrors all the cowboy movie stereotypes. Small settlements scattered across a desert wasteland are terrorised and destroyed by wandering outlaws. The legendary worst of these is Vash the Stampede, "a gunslinger so dangerous a $60 million reward has been placed on his head". Meryl and Millie, two young claims adjustors of the Bernardelli Insurance Society, are assigned to track down Vash and somehow bring him under control. During their search, the women keep meeting someone who claims to be Vash, but he is so young and clumsy that they dismiss him as a glory-hungry imposter. Yet this dork keeps accidentally stumbling to victory over the villains of each episode.

Veteran anime fans will recognise Vash as the classic anime hero disguised as a bumpkin (*Cobra*, *City Hunter*, *Golden Boy*). The first two of four episodes on this first video are pure Western exaggerated comedy; #3 and #4 begin to drop clues that both Vash and Meryl have mysterious pasts and secret agendas. The series will evolve to become more dramatic and more science-fictional, as the history of this planet and its lost Earth technology (think *Saber Marionettes*) come to the fore. Eight videos are an investment but *Trigun* looks worth it. ●

Jubei-chan the Ninja Girl

Format: VHS, sub/dub, NTSC
Directors: Hiroaki Sakurai
Duration: 100 mins
Certificate: unrated
Price: $24.99
Distributor: Bandai
Reviewer: Cathy Sterling
Rating: ★★

It was Jubei's father Mataemon who founded the Yagyu school, his brother Matajuro who became the hero of a kabuki play. It wasn't until the 20th century that his fan base really kicked off, stirred up by Futaro Yamada's pot-boiler novels, turned into anime that eventually made him better known abroad than the rest of his family.

But this is not the lone-ranger of *Ninja Scroll* or the action hero of *Ninja Resurrection*, this is Jubei in his last days, a twilight warrior searching for his successor. With his dying breath, he entrusts the quest to his servant Koinosuke, who finds Jubei's heir 300 years later.

Jiyu "Jubei" Nanohana is a school-girl with large breasts and pert buttocks (I mention this because it seems to be how Koinosuke decides she is the Chosen One). Transferring to a new school populated by the descendants of samurai, she is adored by all, even Shiro Ryujoji, whose family, wronged by the original Jubei, insists on sending evil supply-teachers to challenge her to duels.

Her father is a narcoleptic writer, seemingly modelled on series creator Akitaro Daichi, who can't get much sleep if he's constantly churning out jelly-mould "concepts" like the similarly silly *Lordless Retainer Tsukikage* and the give-us-your-money card-game cash-in *Moncollé*. *Jubei-chan* must have looked great on paper – a samurai spoof from the very same Madhouse studio that gave us the kinetic *Ninja Scroll*, featuring school gags, unwelcome guests, historical references, mawkish romance, transformations and fighting. In other words, re-heated *Ranma 1/2*, further damaged by a succession of befuddling ethnocentric in-jokes for the benefit of Japanese parents who remember the 1950s samurai swashbucklers.

Without the presence of other Jubei stories in English, there is little chance that this would have even been considered for translation. Its historical roots are too deeply buried; some, like the prissy Sachi Toyama's relationship to Toyama no Kinsan (also parodied in *Samurai Gold*) would even be difficult for a Japanese audience. Others, like the simian Ozaru and Kozaru getting their names from Big Monkey and Little Monkey, could really do with explanatory sleeve notes. In the hands of AnimEigo, this would have been an obscure but intriguing subtitled tape. In the hands of Bandai, whose English adaptation credits six "producers" but no translator, it proves to be a nonsensical dub in which a mystified cast and crew hope that the audience will laugh at jokes that they plainly do not find funny themselves. With four episodes on a single tape, this is excellent value for money, though its repetitive nature gets boring very fast. ●

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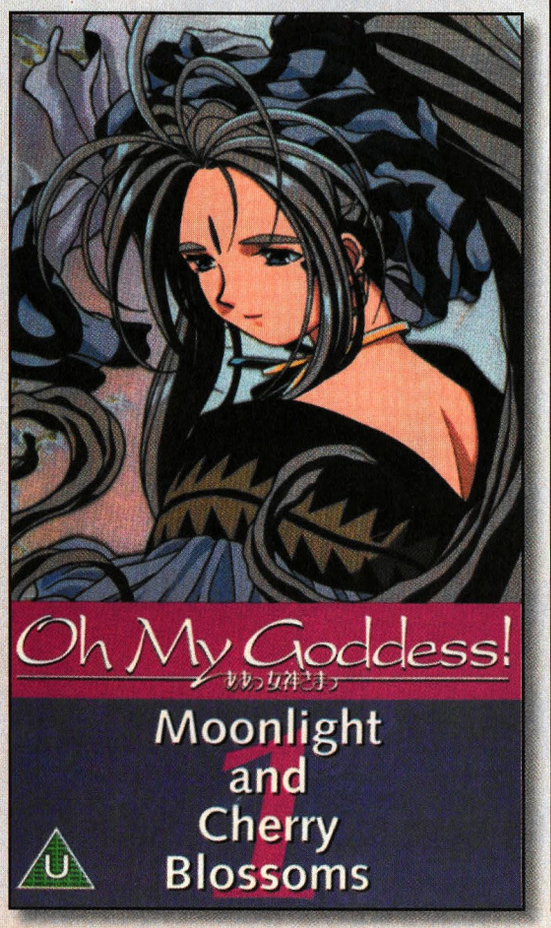
UK ANIME

Oh My Goddess

Format: VHS, dub, PAL
Directors: Hiroaki Goda
Duration: 30 mins
Certificate: U
Price: £12.99
Distributor: MVM
Reviewer: Cathy Sterling
Rating: ★★★

Hapless short-arse Keiichi dials out for a pizza and accidentally gets through to the Goddess Helpline. When Belldandy (Verthandi – the Norse embodiment of the concept of Being) turns up in his bedroom and offers to grant him a wish, he wishes for her to be his girlfriend, and they're stuck with each other. The couple are thrown out of his unisex dorm and drive around for a while, eventually finding an old temple where God says they can doss down. Belldandy turns out to be very good at cleaning and cooking, and even cures Keiichi's cold. Sort of like a Norse nurse.

The acting and timing in AnimEigo's dub is excellent, marred only by a sound mixer who seems to have pushed all the cues up to 11, causing unnecessary distortion on much of the dialogue. *Aladdin* with a pretty djinni, Kosuke Fujishima's story posits a boy who is pure of heart and bestows upon him the perfect girlfriend. Long-term fans know that the couple are predestined for each other, and it's not just wish-fulfilment for a saddo, so director Goda subtly suggests that point with an opening shot showing Belldandy casting a spell. For what, you may ask. Perhaps *she* is summoning him. Mad cow. ●



Kimagure Orange Road #1

Directors: Hiroki Takagi
Format: VHS, sub, PAL
Duration: 52 mins
Certificate: 15
Price: £12.99
Distributor: MVM
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★

Teenage boy Kyosuke makes light of the fact that he's a psychic, but it proves useful when he's in a tight spot. Throughout this series, he fancies the black-haired Madoka while the mousy brown-haired Hikaru fancies *him*. Cue much sexual innuendo of the innocent variety which lends no small degree of charm to the likeable if lightweight proceedings.

I was a Cat; I was a Fish is a body-swap story in which Kyosuke finds turning into animals, with much humour derived from his retaining an obviously human fascination for boobs while occupying alternate animal forms. He's caught in Madoka's fishing net while watching her cleavage upon which he later finds himself happily snuggled. The less memorable *Hurricane! Akane* uses a shape-shifter as another starting point for romantic farce. ●

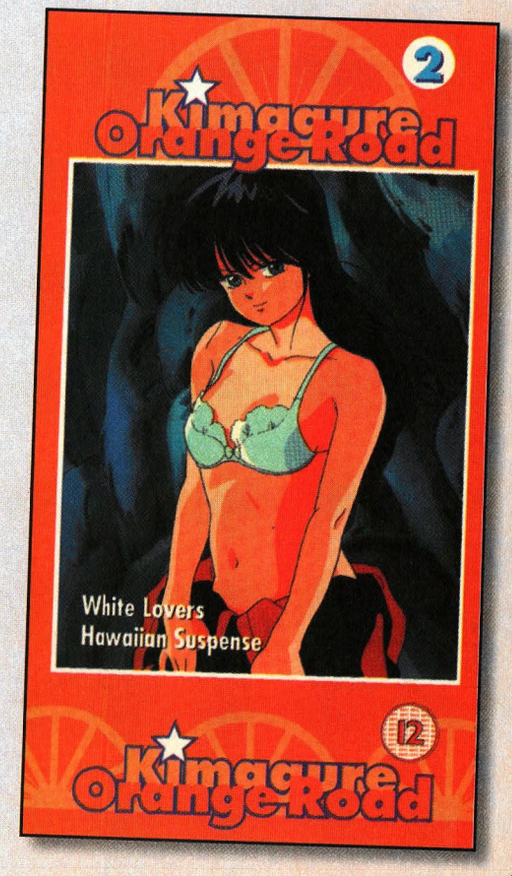
Kimagure Orange Road #2

Format: VHS, sub, PAL
Directors: Koichi Nakamura, Shigeru Morikawa
Duration: 50 mins
Certificate: 15
Price: £12.99
Distributor: MVM
Reviewer: Jonathan Clements
Rating: ★★★

Many centuries ago, an eloping couple died in the snows and the mountain has been cursed ever since. Lovers may not ski the slopes together, lest they be parted by the jealous ghost of an abandoned woman. Which kind of dumps Kyosuke in it; since he isn't Madoka's boyfriend, he can't object to skiing with her… can he? Needless to say, our two would-be lovers are trapped by an avalanche and forced to admit their feelings, if not to each other than at least to the spirits of the mountain (and a contented audience).

Double doses of nostalgia here, in creator Izumi Matsumoto's glowing regard for 1980s fashion and in the strangely retro feel. By the time these video episodes limped out, *Orange Road* (see MM13) was dead and buried, but Kenji Terada writes a pair of vacation scripts designed to keep the feel of the original without messing up the continuity of the television series. The gang rove further afield in part two, going to Hawaii just in time to get mixed up in a kidnapping plan by evil foreigners.

It seems churlish to complain that Kyosuke's psychic powers are criminally under-used, or that our knowledge of their existence removes every scrap of jeopardy. Instead, just enjoy the sight of two people who are made for each other, coyly pretending otherwise in a show that was always better as a romance than as science fiction. ●



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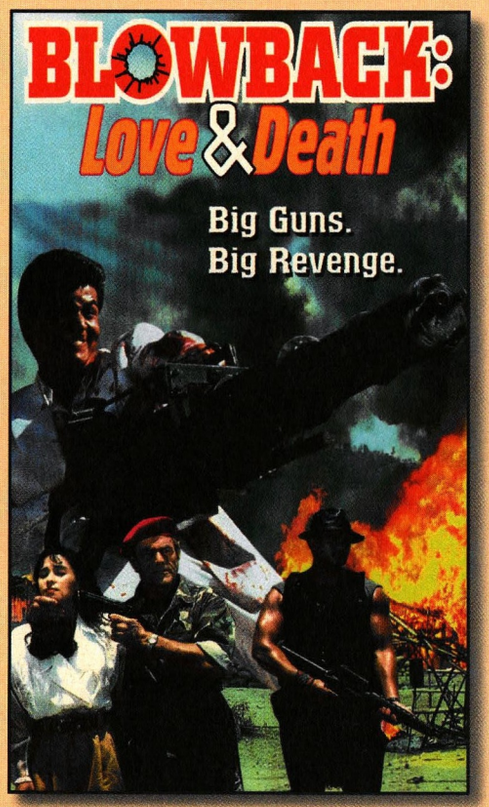
LIVE ACTION

Blowback: Love & Death

Format: VHS, sub, NTSC
Directors: Atsushi Muroga
Duration: 88 mins
Certificate: unrated
Price: $24.99
Distributor: Asian Pulp Cinema
Reviewer: Jim McLennan
Rating: ★★★

As with *Zero Woman*, Asia Pulp Cinema have skipped the first in a series, though that's far less relevant than this movie's shameless cloning, in a modern setting, of Sergio Corbucci's grim spaghetti Western classic, *Django*. Riki Takeuchi takes Franco Nero's role, as a taciturn gunslinger who comes to a grubby town (Manila, in this case) to extract revenge, for the usual reasons. While common elements lurk throughout, the finale blossoms into a fully-fledged restaging, with the anti-hero dragging a coffin round like an oversized rabbit's foot.

Until then, most of the film is occupied with him taking out local scumbags, on his way up the food chain towards the big boss. These shoot-outs fall some way short of the John Woo standard to which they aspire, yet Takeuchi is good enough to keep you interested in the character between times, aided by Masanari Abe's effective score. The atmosphere is satisfactorily dark too, with few light moments alleviating the gloom, even if the bad guys are graduates from the Imperial Storm Trooper school of shooting. It's perhaps worth an extra star if you haven't seen the original source, but if you have, this may well seem rather too brazen a copy. ●



Lone Wolf & Cub: Baby Cart in Peril

Format: VHS, sub, widescreen, PAL
Director: Buichi Saito
Duration: 81 mins
Certificate: 18
Price: £14.99
Distributor: Warrior
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★

This fourth *Lone Wolf & Cub* adaptation chops and changes between two narrative strands. Opening with serious splatter as beautiful bare-breasted swordswoman Oyuki swiftly dispatches would-be assassins. Hired to kill her, Ogami Itto hears of her incredible tolerance of pain from an impressed tattooist. Then Itto runs into his own personal nemesis Gunbei, the warrior banned from the shadow Yagyu clan for duelling with the then-Executioner before the watching eyes of the Shogunate Court.

Thirty minutes in, Oyuki's past takes centre stage for her rape by a ruthless swordfighting instructor given to brandishing a flaming blade and whose hypnotic eyes tend to be multiplied by camera trickery into an apparition out of Hitchcock/Dali's *Spellbound*. Itto spends some time among the *hinin* (social untouchables scraping a living as street performers) whose leader – Oyuki's father – has disowned her. Itto and infant Daigoro track down Oyuki bathing at a spa.

Despite its two disparate storylines, fresh directorial blood Saito keeps the franchise firmly running along previously established lines. But then, maintaining the pace (and intermittent bloodletting!) of earlier entries, Saito injects such unexpected and arresting moments as Oyuki's exposing her breasts to distract a male adversary in order to administer his death blow. *[That old trick? – Ed.]* ●

The Ladies' Phone Sex Club

Director: Yota Watanabe
Format: VHS, sub, NTSC
Duration: 88 mins
Certificate: unrated
Price: $24.99
Distributor: Asian Pulp Cinema
Reviewer: Jim McLennan
Rating: ★★★

The Q2 phone-sex agency has problems. Its owner loves the top employee Lulu (Sho Kawaide), who is fast closing in on her thousandth "satisfied" customer. His mother wants him to move into a more respectable business, his brother is a superhero wannabe, and his former fiancée is also back on the scene. She made him the man he is today, and is played by *Weather Woman*'s Kei Mizutani, that is indeed the heady scent of oestrogen-fuelled trouble brewing.

The cover is inspired by *Emmanuelle*, but that's where any similarity stops: the subtlety is at the level you'd expect from the synopsis above and a story by Haruka Inui, the creator of *Ogenki Clinic*.

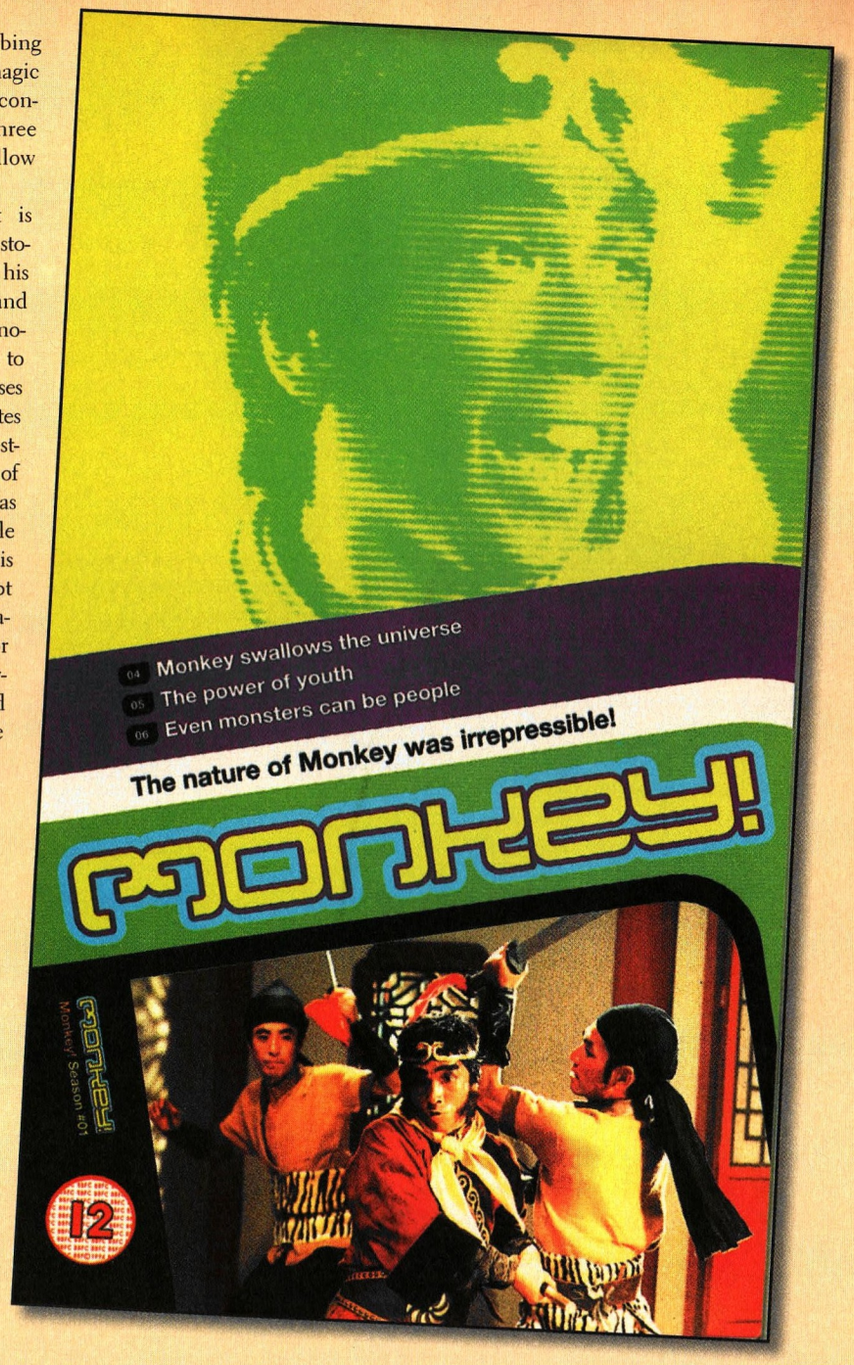
Still, the characters are delightfully warped: you'll hear the word *hentai ["pervert" – Ed.]* used a lot, and they wear their deviations with a refreshing lack of shame. Once we meet them, however, the film meanders off in an aimless and largely futile quest for plot development. It needn't have bothered, since I suspect the audience would prefer 40 minutes of slow pans up and down the winsome delights of the lead actresses. But there's a fair bit of that anyway, and I'm certainly not complaining. ●

Monkey #2

Format: VHS, dub, PAL
Directors: Daisuke Yamazaki/Yosuke Watanabe
Duration: 130 mins
Certificate: 12
Price: £12.99
Distributor: Fabulous Films
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★

Three further episodes, as boy-priest Tripitaka and supernatural outcasts Monkey, Pigsy and Sandy set off to retrieve the sacred Buddhist scriptures from India. However as with all the best serial television shows, that bigger is less important than the issues immediately at hand. Each episode contains predictable-but-enjoyable bouts of fighting, striking-but-hokey effects and lively-but-effective English-language dubbing in adventures including magic bottle weaponry, an out-of-control adolescent deity and three demons coloured red, yellow and blue.

Character development is also evident across the three stories, with Pigsy falling prey to his womanising tendencies and Sandy awakening as an innocent romantic. Tripitaka fails to see through the human disguises of three demons and berates Monkey for doing so, suggesting that earlier impressions of ape as buffoon and priest as perceptive may be less reliable than they appeared. As if this weren't enough, the script throws in such deep metaphysical contents as, for instance, a demon the boy-priest has previously spared threatening to return and take him over. Tackily likeable. ●



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The Blade

Director: Tsui Hark (credited to 1st a.d. Mark Wu on print)
Format: DVD, remastered sub, widescreen 1.85:1, PAL/Region 2 Coded
Duration: 105 mins
Certificate: 18
Price: £19.99
Distributor: MIA
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★

For the first five or so minutes, you'd be forgiven for thinking you were watching a movie by a Chinese art house director like Zhang Yimou or Chen Kaige – art direction and photography positively ooze an atmospheric style contrary to customary Tsui Hark stunt-laden spectaculars. But after narrating about her fairy-tale childhood, heroine Song Nei suddenly discovers what her father's foundry manufactures when she stumbles on a room of newly minted swords. By this point, the viewer has become completely absorbed.

As per the plot of Chang Cheh's classic *One Armed Swordsman* (MM13), man loses arm, man learns sword-fighting, man defeats enemies. Tsui reworks this with man-traps all over the place which people step or unwarily reach into (and lose an arm). What follows possesses his expected style and energy, including a barrage of highly effective sword-play stunt set pieces. Chiu Chek is terrific as the loser of an arm sworn to avenge his father, while tattooed killer Xiong Xin Xin makes all the required stunt moves and lends a suitable degree of menace. Chaste lead Song Nei is contrasted nicely with bad girl Valerie Chow (Tony Leung Chiu-wai's air hostess girlfriend in *Chungking Express*). Correctly wide-screened, the whole thing looks lovely on DVD. ●

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COMICS

Dark Angel #1: The Path to Destiny

Format: Compilation
Writer/Artist: Kia Asamiya
Price: $15.95
Publisher: CPM Manga
Reviewer: Martin Russ
Rating: ★★★★

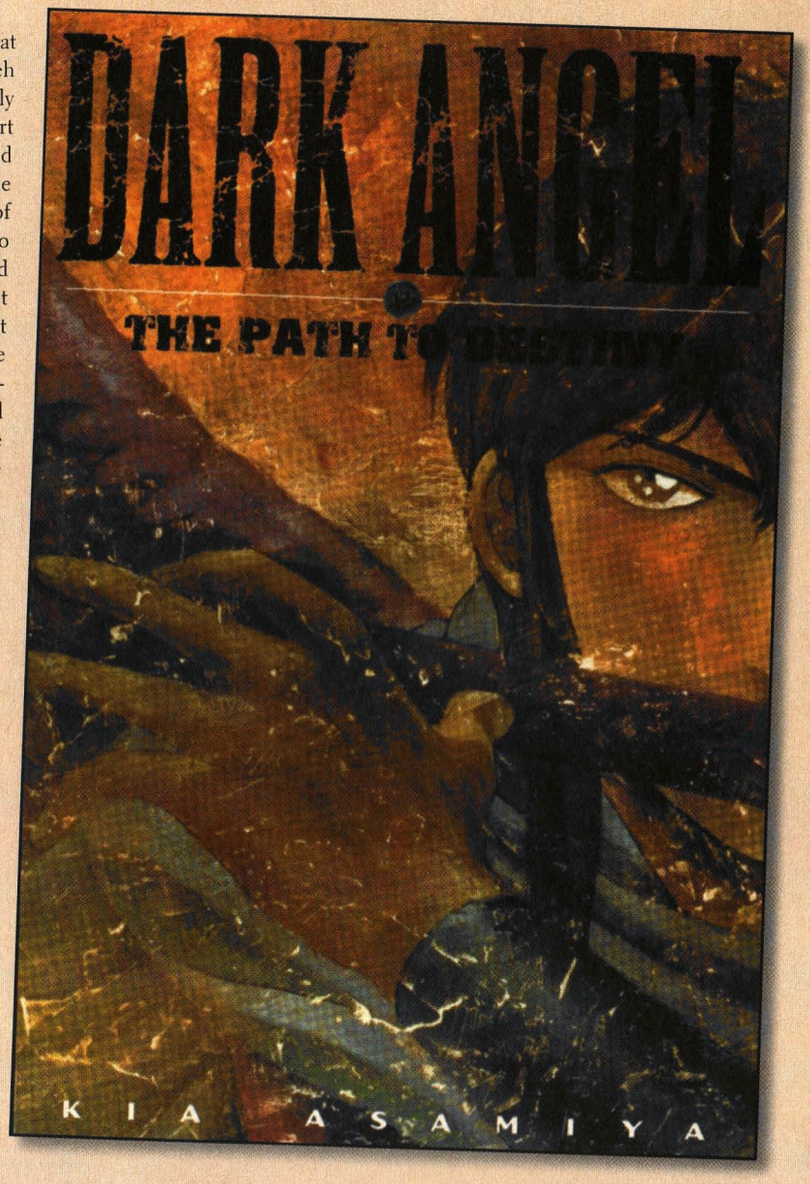
Breaking conventions is the hardest thing to do. Copying and repetition are much easier, and nowhere near as challenging. Did someone whisper Hollywood movies?

Kia Asamiya (*Silent Möbius, Nadesico, Steam Detectives...*) goes for the difficult, and this graphic novel delivers more than just the collected comics. There's the original beginning from *Newtype* magazine back in September 1990, complete with his revealing notes on his embarrassment at seeing them again. This has a soft, rounded look, whereas the main part of this compilation is from two years later, and is much bolder, with more angular faces, smaller eyes and stronger jaws.

Based on the title, and the fantasy action genre mentioned on the back cover blurb, you might expect that this tale of a swordsman's search for enlightenment would be mostly fighting and grunting, with short gaps of talking to try and squeeze some plot in. But the reverse is true. There's lots of plot, flashbacks, insights into characters and motivations, and it turns out that the hero is a bit inept and inexperienced, whilst the fairy-like Kyo is rather more essential than a mere companion. But she is also fragile and self-sacrificing, which is all the plot I'm revealing. Much more than mere swords and sorcery, it is slow-paced but deep, and totally immersive.

I didn't like the jarring juxtaposition of styles in the 'guest' cover collection, and the printing has *moiré* fringing and other production artefacts that roughen what were presumably once smooth graduations of tone. But the translation reads well, with no obvious typos, and the cover is almost a mirror image of the Japanese original, albeit with the text rotated to suit western eyes.

Overall: distilled escapism that touched me and pulled me in. And getting close to that elusive five star rating. ●



Aquarium #1

Writer/Artist: Tomoko Taniguchi
Format: Comic
Price: $2.95
Publisher: CPM
Reviewer: Cathy Sterling
Rating: ★★★

Naoka is desperate to get to a particular high school, because she likes the uniform. A likely story; actually, she wants to go there because she fancies one of the boys. But when she doesn't get in, she's forced to settle for second-best, sent to a nasty lower-class school where there are "gaudy girls" and "girls who dye their hair red". The sluts.

Unable to cope with such horror, she takes to moping around the local aquarium, where the joker Haruki sees her sniffling and tries to cheer her up with a crazy array of fluffy toys and inane chat about dolphins. Haruki gets short shrift, but when Naoka comes back to the aquarium, he's there again and he just won't give up.

Like the protagonist of the creator's earlier *Call Me Princess* (Reviews, MM18), Naoka is a self-obsessed little snob, a younger sister torn between two men – one unattainable and hence drastically more attractive, the other ready, willing and consequently unsuitable. She strides through a world of couples and gangs, alone in every crowd, turning her back on anyone who attempts to break into her reverie. But Taniguchi loves setting up these situations only to turn them on their head – she's already warned us that this won't be all hearts and flowers. It also has retouch that is an infinite improvement on many other CPM titles and a charmingly clumsy script – changing the aquarium admission prices from yen to dollars won't help much when your heroine spouts faithfully Japlish lines like: "I don't like flighty guys". Nobody ever talked like that at my school, but we were always too gaudy for our own good. ●

Card Captor Sakura

Format: Compilation
Writer/Artist: CLAMP
ISBN: 1-892213-36-2
Publisher: TOKYOPOP.com
Price: $9.95
Reviewer: Paul Corrigan
Rating: ★★★★

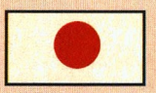
Card Captor Sakura is made to market. Ten-year-old Girl Next Door Sakura must recapture the magical 'Clow Cards' that escaped from a book in her father's library. The premise has clear merchandising possibilities ('Gotta catch 'em all!'); this being a story for girls, it also need not compete for the same fans as *Pokémon*. The English dub of the Card Captors animation (see MM19) may succeed where *Sailor Moon* failed in showing the viability of girl's anime in the English-language market.

The manga, however, is of more than historical interest. Mokona Apapa's art is to her usual high standard, with a lighter, softer line befitting her subject.

Nanase Okawa's writing is her most mature yet, boasting greater psychological candour than the RPG-derivative *Rayearth* and *X/1999*. Sakura's weakness is not her own trauma at her mother's death (she does not remember her), but the scars of others. Her brother, who remembers mother's death, sees "ghosts, girls with no legs, or old men with cracked heads," making Sakura fear her brother's fear. Father's continued devotion to his wife borders on obsessive ("Father puts up a new picture every day"); when a Card wants to trick Sakura into nearly drowning herself, it need only take the form of the goddess of father's mantelpiece.

Unfortunately the TOKYOPOP.com edition's translation appears rushed, with the odd interjection and sentence fragment left half-translated in the scramble. ●

Card Captor Sakura



Format: Compilation
Writer/Artist: CLAMP
ISBN: 4-7700-2644-7
Publisher: Kodansha
Price: £9.99
Reviewer: Julia Sertori
Rating: ★★

Your eyes do not deceive you. This is another version of the self-same *Card Captors* manga reviewed above. This time, it has English and Japanese text, in the same manner as the publisher's earlier *GTO*, *Kosaku Shima* and *Sazae-san* manga.

The Kodansha *Card Captors* is quite literally a family affair, seemingly put together by a father, mother and daughter, though the use of a three-headed translator has not presented a translation significantly better than Tokyo Pop's. In fact, the Kodansha version is stilted and overly literal, anally retaining dictionary definitions for the benefit of the Japanese-speaking, English-*learning* audience for which it was originally aimed. This excuse, of course, also helps them avoid retouching the original sound effects, making this version altogether inferior to the one we already have, despite costing more money.

And is it just me, or is it a little disingenuous for a publisher to sell the English-language rights to something abroad, only to turn around and produce their own version? How would you feel if you discovered that you are now obliged to share this copy of *Manga Max* with a stranger sitting next to you on the train? Kodansha of all people should be aware of how many manga remain untranslated in English – allowing the same title to be translated twice is ultimately self-defeating. ●

Short Program

Writer/Artist: Mitsuru Adachi
Format: Compilation
ISBN: 1-56931-473-X
Price: $16.95
Publisher: Viz
Reviewer: Jonathan Clements
Rating: ★★★★

It's no surprise that so many of Adachi's stories are made into films – like his spartan artwork, his words are just enough to tell a story. A girl's room is messed up during a foiled assault, but she falls for the man who fixes her stereo. A touching conversation between a courting couple becomes something far more sinister. A college boy and a little girl both discover that they're not quite grown-ups yet – in these small but perfectly-formed shorts, the creator of *Slow Step* effortlessly shows us how he has become an international success.

Adachi finds hidden depths in the most mundane situations. Two beery guys turning on the telly to watch women's athletics becomes a touching love story, told solely through their banter. Even for the insanely over-sensitive Japanese, Adachi is sentimental in the extreme. He has a romantic's eye for detail – one story revolves around a woman's choice of scarf – and an optimistic faith in the surety and purity of love. After a while, you start to develop an Adachi Brain. You know that the tiniest throwaway lines will mean something, and you start

to watch for oncoming twists. Which is why, I imagine, this author is so successful in long stories as well.

This is pulp fiction of the truest kind, simple stories told with consummate artistry for a medium with wildly shifting demands – there are even a couple of sulky panels seemingly drawn to fix a last-minute change in pagination! The characters of the first story openly announce that they are only getting into a difficult situation in order to justify the page-count that follows, and Adachi subtly chastises an editor who has made him use a time-worn cliché. There is even one moment where he lingers saucily on a girl undressing, only to get a slap from the editor of *Ciao* magazine, reminding him he's supposed to be writing for a *female* audience. Viz's translators and retouchers do a typically excellent job, though I, of all people, am likely to notice a restaurant called Jonathan's in one story and Yonathan's in another. ●

Gundam Wing #1

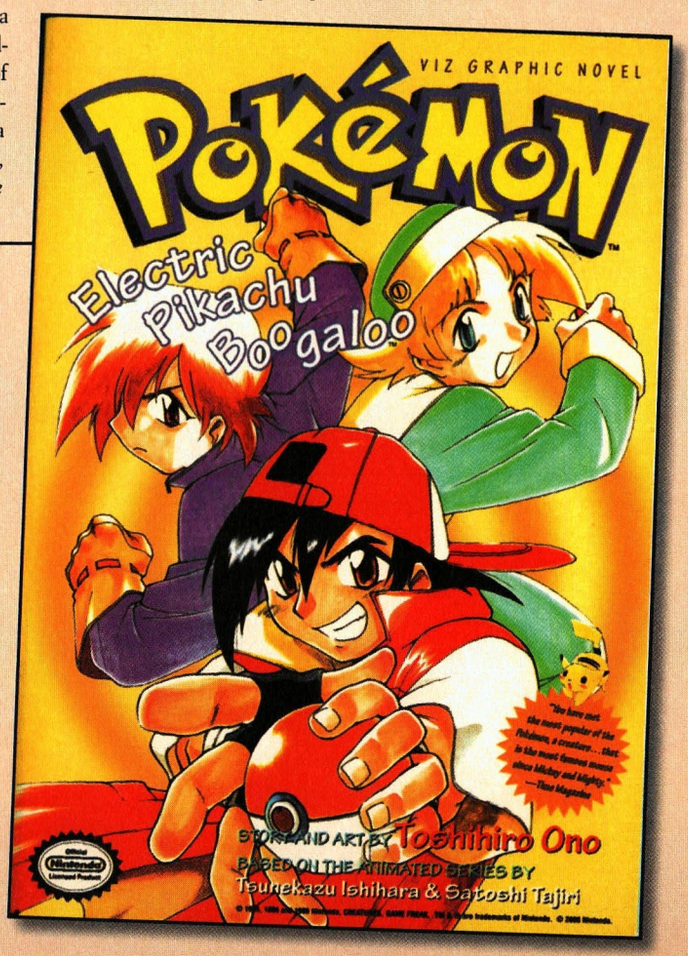
Format: Comic
Writer: Hajime Yadate & Yoshiyuki Tomino
Artist: Koichi Tokita
Price: $2.95
Publisher: Mixx
Reviewer: Jim Swallow
Rating: ★★★

The 1995 teen adventure series *Gundam W* arrives in translated form from Mixx in time for the anime's arrival on the US Cartoon Network, and from the striking John Ott cover and the thickness of the 48-page first issue (other publishers please take note), it looks like readers are going to get more bang for their buck. But be warned, this incarnation of Tomino's huge mecha opera is aimed squarely at the kid-vid end of the market. The plot of *Gundam Wing* owes more to confrontational game-inspired manga than to its giant robot ancestors, more *Street Fighter* than *War in the Pocket*, setting up mecha punch-ups within the first few pages. Yadate and Tomino posit a future where an Earth government rules the orbital colonies with an iron fist. In order to subvert the overlords, five youthful pilots are sent to Earth, but their actual orders are unclear and they seem more intent on fighting each other than sticking it to the nasty Earthers. Tokita's art is merely average and isn't helped the choice of clunky text fonts in dialogue and caption panels. ●

Pokémon: Electric Pikachu Boogaloo

Format: Compilation
Writer/Artist: Toshihiro Ono
ISBN: 1-56931-436-5
Publisher: Viz
Price: $12.95
Reviewer: Julia Sertori
Rating: ★★

Still risibly claiming to be a graphic "novel" (like *War & Peace*, but with fighting animals), *Electric Pikachu Boogaloo* is here to squeeze a little more moolah out of the Poke-faithful. In "I'm Your Venusaur" (ho ho), several Pokémon climb a tree in search of a mythical spirit, who turns out to be part of the tree itself. "It's some kinda humongous topiary!" proclaims Pikachu, after he has been translated, edited *and* rewritten. I think I preferred him when all he said was "Pika". In "Clefairy in Space", writer Ono takes pot-shots at the *X-Files* and its clones, as pundits attempt to prove that a sci-fi movie about Clefairy is based on fact, and that the swirly-headed critters genuinely are from space. Amidst all this banter, Team Rocket pops up occasionally to attempt a nefarious deed, though in "Days of Gloom and Glory" the nasty Meowth reveals that his ability to speak got him dumped by an old cat-flame. Bit of depth there, though soon it's time for another Pokémon tournament, and Ash gets the best line of the book: "Use your tackle, Bulbasaur!" Priceless. ●


VIZ GRAPHIC NOVEL
POKÉMON
Electric Pikachu Boogaloo
STORY AND ART BY Toshihiro Ono
BASED ON THE ANIMATED SERIES BY
Tsunekazu Ishihara & Satoshi Tajiri

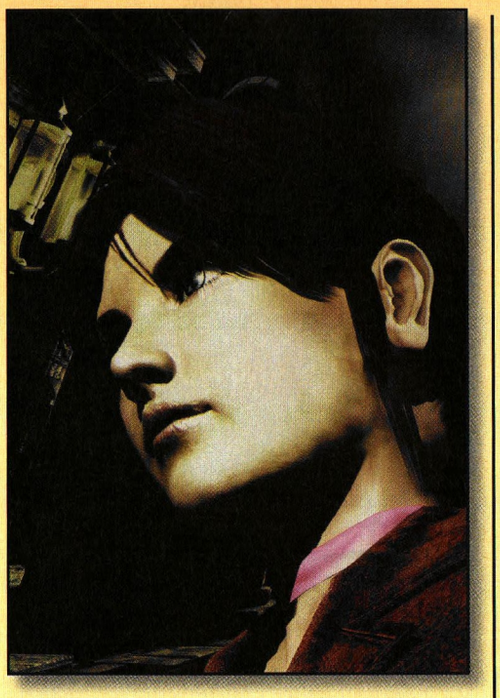
MISCELLANEOUS

Resident Evil: Code Veronica

Format: Dreamcast game
Distributor: Eidos
Price: £39
Reviewer: Paul Watson
Rating: ★★★★★

Good news for Sega – the fifth *Resident Evil* game arrives and this time it's on the Dreamcast. Though, strictly speaking, this is number three when it comes to the story chronology. While searching for her brother Chris (from *Resident Evil #1*) in Europe, Claire Redfield is captured by the Umbrella Corporation and imprisoned on a remote island facility. When Claire is released by a wounded guard, she emerges into a zombie infested nightmare. Welcome to the world of survival horror. Again!

Exchanging the detailed rendered backgrounds of the previous games with a polygon-built world, I was wondering how well the game would survive the leap to true 3D environments. Capcom have certainly come up with the goods in this department, as the game looks absolutely gorgeous. The polygons also help for some excellently seamed cut



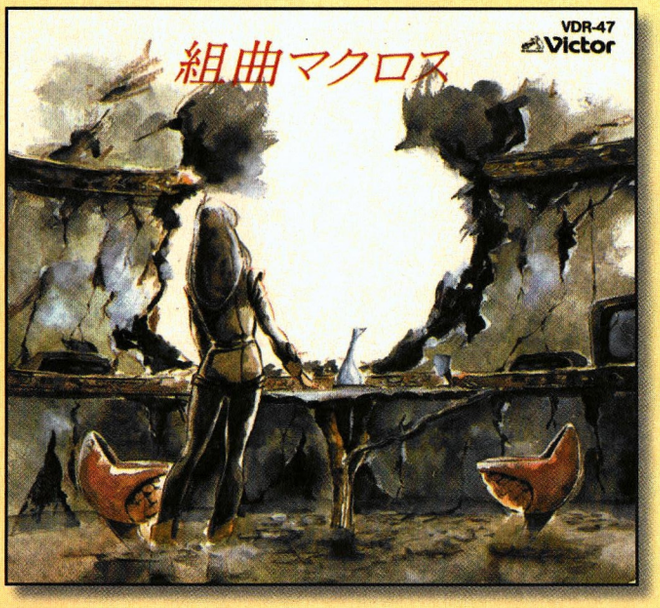
scenes; one featuring fellow prisoner Steve jumping through a window even had a panning shot cribbed from *The Matrix*.

Although in gameplay terms little has moved on, *Code Veronica* is a sensual treat. It oozes atmosphere and is great fun to play. With an excellent bonus feature unlocked on completion, you'll definitely find yourself going back for another attempt. Buy a Dreamcast and get a copy. ●

Macross Suite

Format: CD
Artist: Kentaro Haneda
Serial: VDR-47
Price: c.£22
Publisher: Victor
Reviewer: Cathy Sterling
Rating: ★★

After a truly promising beginning with the "Four Seasons" sonata, the *Macross Suite* slowly tails off into passable but disappointing piano twinklings *à la* Richard Clayderman, with stops on the way for pastiches of Acker Bilk and any local performer you care to name whose posters contain the words "and his orchestra".



Haneda ("and his orchestra", in this case, the Healthy Wings ensemble – you couldn't make this up!) also provides a number of meditations in the sleeve notes, playing up the universality of the *Macross* themes of love and loss, and thereby queering his own pitch by admitting the album's tenuous connection to the series it purports to honour. Unlike Yoko Kanno's later *Macross* compositions, which built and drew upon consistent musical themes to make a coherent whole, Haneda's *Macross Suite* is a random selection of orchestrated compositions, tied up with arbitrary claims like "This piece envisions the three hearts of the three lead characters." But just because he decides to call it "Three Hearts", that doesn't make the piece in question a compulsory purchase for *Macross* fans.

Who can blame Haneda for trying it on a little? As the composer for such joyless fripperies as *Samurai Gold* and *Odin*, he needs to play up his attachments to anime like this that actually have a fan following. If only he'd thought about it harder – as the composer for *Thunderbirds 2086*, he could have tapped into the whole Gerry Anderson nostalgia kick and stood a much better chance. ●

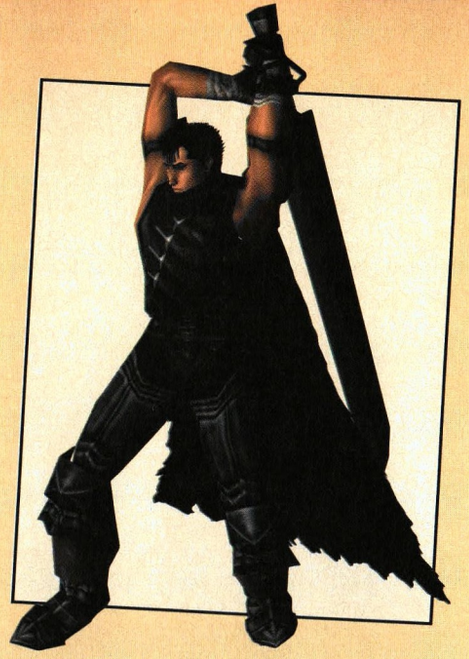
Space Channel 5

Format: Dreamcast
Price: ¥6800
Distributor: Sega
Reviewer: Amos Wong
Rating: ★★★★

Evolving the gameplay of *Bust A Move Dance and Rhythm* to incorporate expansive environments and an alien invasion story, *Space Channel 5* is perhaps the only game where you have to quell an alien attack by mimicking their dance moves and zapping them on cue! Earthlings rescued from alien clutches join your mission; adept players will accumulate an entourage of waiters, guitar players, models and cameramen who dance in synch with slinky reporter Ulala's funky gyrations.The graphics are superb, layering real-time characters with streaming movie backgrounds and the music, highly reminiscent of Japanese band Pizzicato 5, is infectious. While initially easy, beats become more syncopated and the introduction of two types of lasers (one to zap foes, the other to save friends) ups the challenge. Additional enemies include competing reporters, space pirates and hilarious bosses. Characters are stylishly dressed and their moves impeccably motion-captured; extra levels become available after completing the game. From space stations and asteroid fields to psychedelic tunnels and the enemy's base, the visuals take cues from the likes of *Austin Powers*, *Barbarella*, *2001* and *Pokémon*, imaginatively fusing them together. The result is an inspired, cosmically cool and kitsch sci-fi dancefest, essential for Dreamcast owners. ●

Sword of the Berserk

Format: Dreamcast game
Distributor: Eidos
Price: £39
Reviewer: Paul Watson
Rating: ★★

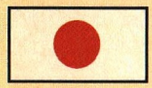


Based on Kentaro Miura's manga (see MM19), *Sword of the Berserk* is a roaming fighting game in which you play the mighty Guts. With one eye, a mechanical arm and a ridiculously huge sword, Guts and his party cross paths with a wagon of entertainers under attack. After you rescue them, the story begins to unfold.

Graphically, things look okay with accurate character designs and pleasing light effects on show but compared with other Dreamcast titles, you get the impression that the machine is capable of far better things. In terms of gameplay, *Sword of the Berserk* is a button-basher thoroughbred. Most of the levels are huge brawls with multiple enemies to fight at once. With the obligatory boss characters thrown in, that's about all there is to it. The fact that most players will probably complete it on their first go doesn't help much, either. The gore fans are well catered for though, and arterial spray washes the screen with every hit to justify the content warning when the game loads.

Sword of the Berserk has little to offer hardened gamers, and though fun at first, it gets repetitive very quickly. Also, the amount of time spent watching the cut scenes vastly outweighs the time spent actually playing! One to rent. ●

Zombie Revenge



Format: Dreamcast (JPN, also available in US)
Price:
Distributor: Sega
Reviewer: Amos Wong
Rating: ★★

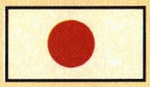
Zombie Revenge is best described as an arcade-style *Resident Evil*, with more shooting and punching but less thinking. A 3D incarnation of side scrolling beat 'em ups of old, the environments and creatures are excellent, though the human characters leave a lot to be desired.

Disembowelling enemies with a massive drill or sinking a hatchet in their skulls certainly raises a laugh. Truth is, the gameplay has so many annoying quirks, with no save points, you'd need unlimited continues to reach the psychedelic climax. The worst offenders are the flawed aiming system, loss of accumulated weapons and unstoppable fighting combos with thin air, when the enemy's just to the left!

To its credit, the two player mode is quite enjoyable and the (I hope) deliberately cheesy voice acting is hysterically funny. Why, it makes *Resident Evil*'s dialogue seem like high art! There's a variety of sub games, like a one on one fight, but it hardly compares to a real fighting title.

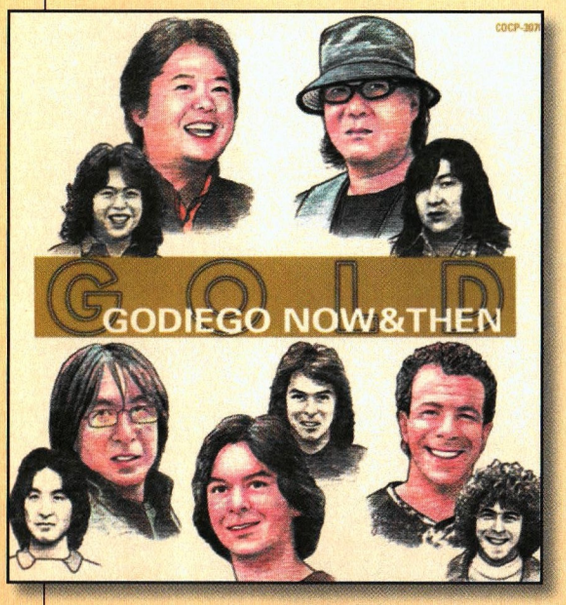
At its best, *Zombie Revenge* gives a giddy sensation akin to the infamous lawnmower scene in *Brain Dead*. Its worth hiring for an evening's worth of entertainment with friends. But that's about it. ●

Turn-A Gundam OST #2

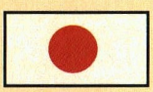


Format: CD
Artist: Yoko Kanno et al.
Serial: KICA-481
Price: c.£22
Publisher: King Record
Reviewer: Cathy Sterling
Rating: ★★★★

Inferior Kanno, though that still leaves *Turn-A Gundam* streets ahead of the rest of the world, this mixes the orchestral swells of her superb *Brainpowered* ("Barbarian" could easily have come from either show, and even begins with an exultation straight out of *Macross Plus*' "Ah Saï En") with some of the pop collaborations that characterised *Cowboy Bebop*. Carla Vallet returns with another drum-&-bass curio in "Alfa & Omega", and Chris Mosdell (best known abroad for penning "Behind the Mask" with Michael Jackson), provides the lounge ballad "Until". "Spirit of the Moon" is an uncharacteristic return to Japanese roots, with taiko drummers, shakuhachi flutes and a lot of grunting, reminiscent of the non-Kanno anime *Gasaraki*. And a whole lot more, totalling 24 tracks and 58 minutes of eclectic wonder. Kanno's musical fetish of the moment? Tuvan nose-singers. What a girl! ●



Gold: Godiego Now & Then



Format: CD
Artist: Various
Serial: COCP-30769
Price: c.£22
Publisher: Columbia
Reviewer: Julia Sertori
Rating: ★★

Between 1976 and 1985, Godiego notched up 27 albums. They were the first Japanese band to play in China. They played a massive concert in Kathmandu. They did the soundtrack to *Monkey*. But although they've all gone on to other things (mainly behind the mixing desk), the *Gold* CD to promote last year's reunion tour makes them sound like the world's worst wedding combo.

Here's the good news, the album includes their immortal *Monkey* theme song from the TV series (see MM18), as well as the closing *Gandhara*, which inspired the anime of the same name. As a bonus to anime obscurantists, there's even their theme from the *Galaxy Express 999* movie.

But Tommy Snyder's *Water Margin* theme (see MM7) is absent – this is a tribute to Godiego, not their original members, so solo projects are omitted. More problematic is the fact that the rest of the songs just aren't much good. So middle-of-the-road it's surprising they haven't been pulled over, they look and sound like Toto in sensible sweaters. Though Godiego often sung in English, they did so for an audience of Japanese-speakers, with lyrics that would be hard-pressed to get second place in Israel's Song for Europe, and love-the-world pap that would disgrace a church full of happy-clappers. And considering that two gaijin musicians are in their line-up, there's no excuse for rubbish like "what a cocky saucy monkey this one is", no matter how much we all love them. ●

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TITAN BOOKS

Letters

We regret that we cannot reply personally to any correspondence or return any unsolicited items sent to the magazine.

THERE'S THE DUB

When you are writing a review of any anime title, please could you say whether the version you watched was dubbed, subtitled or both. If you are able to see some of each (ideally), I am sure all your readers would be interested to know which has the better (read "most natural sounding") voice acting and whether any other alterations have been made to (in the producers' minds) meet the tastes of English audiences, as for the US *Sailor Moon* titles & *BGC2040*, for example.

Unfortunately not many titles are in bilingual DVD format yet, and not everyone can afford to go DVD, so the hard choice for each series on VHS is dub, sub or mixture. Thanks for your time.

Robert J Newson, Somerset, England

GOT THE BLUES?

MM15 was a slammin' one as always. I really appreciate the web addresses and supplementary contact info which accompany the articles and reviews. I hope you can help with info on one series that is super-sparse to come by. Peter J. Evans' article "Somewhere in Time" featured a paragraph on Yoshio Aramaki's *Deep Blue Fleet*. I have surfed the web high and low through every search engine using the film's title, Aramaki and the director Ryosuke Takahashi's name and have come up empty. I did find a reference to the author's other sci fi novels, but strictly in a library file format. "Help me Obi Wan, you're my only hope!" Hmmm, I mean to say that I would appreciate any assistance your staff or the article's author could render in an effort to find any manga, anime, art or articles written/created specifically about this series.

Joseph J. Snell, Minneapolis, Minnesota

We're proud to report that we couldn't find any English sources on *Deep Blue Fleet* either. We got all of our information from Japanese, though the mistake that mixed up Isoroku Yamamoto and Isoroku Takano was all the editor's doing.

CULTURAL SPONGES

As a student born and bred in rural Australia, I can but wonder how your staff has gained such an all-encompassing grasp on almost all facets of modern culture. One gapes at your writers' allusions to luminaries of literature (both English and Japanese) film, music, and art. Is this knowledge imbued by nothing but a keen mind and a journalistic degree, or merely the results of slack-arsed Arts students living in their own form of cultural sponge? Also is this talent limited to your staff, for somehow I doubt Titan's writers for the *Xena* magazine have a similar high standard.

Patrick Thompson, Singleton, New South Wales

Some *Manga Max* writers are graduates of the university of life; others are scientists. Still more have pert arses. The minions come from many backgrounds, but most could, or genuinely do, work in the fields they discuss. We have professional artists, animators, writers and game designers, chiefly because we think the money you spend on *Manga Max* should go towards something of value, not recycled press releases and ignorant guesswork. So thank you for noticing... I think. And we'd just like to point out that *Xena* magazine's writers are tested to ensure they have the accurate historical knowledge and attention to detail for which the series is famed.

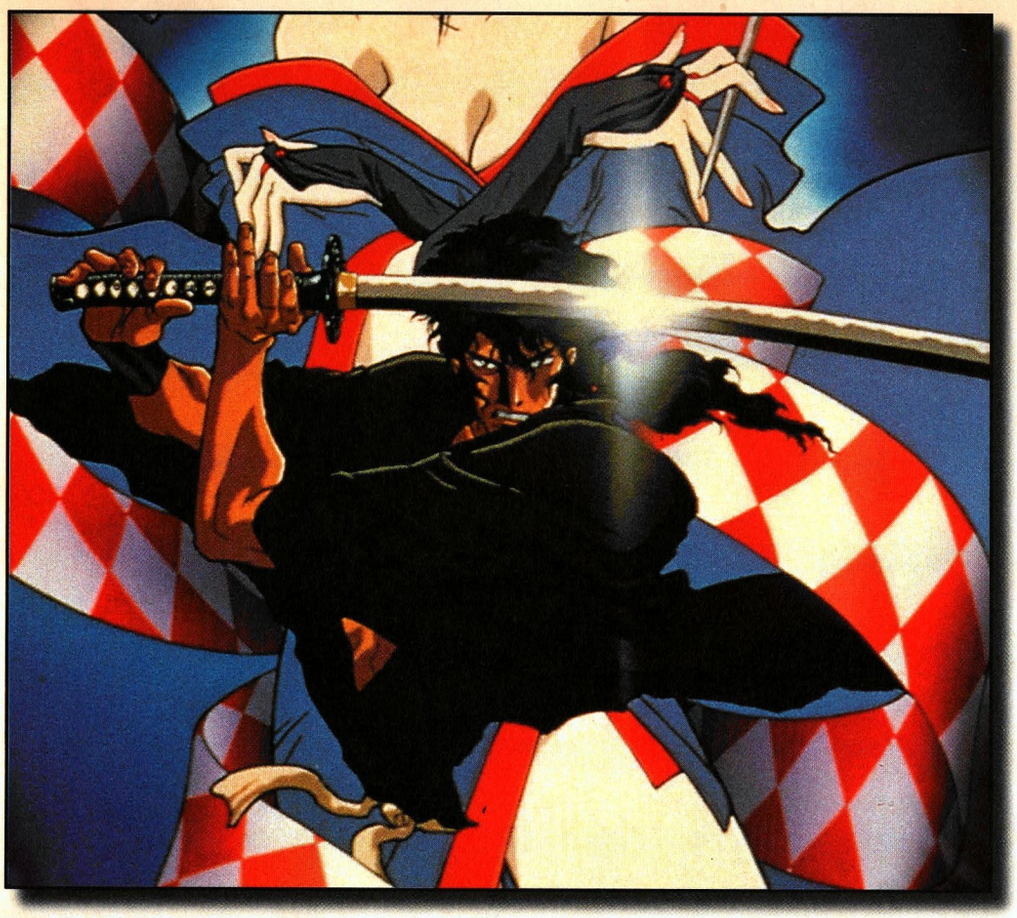
A MALE CONCERN

Why do you have females like Julia Sertori reviewing porno comics and vids? From reading her reviews one gets the impression that she'd rather be reviewing pavement pizzas. To be fair, I'd be just as inept and narrow-minded reviewing some soppy shojo piece about a 10th Grader torn between her bento box and a cheeseburger. I mean, when the likes of U-Jin or Ippei are creating their porno masterpieces they aren't doing so with a view to pleasing gaijin girlies.

Let's face it, whilst there are a lot of females into porn out there (especially in Japan) it is still primarily a male concern. So let's have the porn stuff reviewed by its target audience and not by some uptight chick. And if you're stuck for a reviewer just lift up a rock and give us perverts a shout.

"hentai_manga_fan", via e-mail

Julia replies: "There's nothing inept about the ability to distinguish between good porn (*Sexorcist*, MM4) and bad (*Dream Hazard*, MM17). Demanding reviews written solely by the target audience is the most narrow-minded thing I've heard this year. And I'm not uptight, I'm just looking for a *real* man."



WRATH OF THE NINJA

There are some rumours about a sequel to the most famous *Ninja Scroll*. Are they by any means true? Also, do you know the release date of the next episodes from the series *Ninja Resurrection*?
Kostas Iovis, via e-mail

The rumours about *Ninja Scroll* 2 seem to have been kicked off by the misleading press releases for *Ninja Resurrection*, which implied it was a direct sequel. For more details on the current standing of the franchise, see our Yoshiaki Kawajiri article in MM17. There are no current plans to continue the series.

FULL MARX

Could somebody please show that tree-hugging hippie Michael Dobbs (MM17) the merchandise that goes with anime like *Pokemon* or *Dragon Ball*? *Mononoke* and any other adult anime would be difficult to market to the mainstream because animation is perceived in the West as "children's cartoons" and anime is seen as the "dirty Japanese cartoons". Anime has to clean up its act and possibly link itself with the highly political animation industry of Eastern Europe to give it a mature aura, but that will be the day when I see CPM or Manga Entertainment giving up artistic vomit like *Urotsukidoji* by Toshio Maeda in favour of the award-winning *Hotel E* by Pritt Parn.

But enough of this idle banter. I wish to extend an open invitation to manga and anime fans in the North and Republic of Ireland, of whom I know there are a good number, to write to me so I can get a census of numbers and locations to make the Eirtaka fan club as good as any in Europe and America.

Secondly, I wish to know addresses of European mail-order companies that sell manga and anime. They share the same currency as Ireland (the Euro) and I am led to believe they have a larger fan base with a broader genre spectrum than Britain.
Rory O'Neill, Apartment 4, 7 Anglesea Terrace, Cork, Ireland

www.anipike.com should answer all of your questions about Europe.

JAPANESE WHISPERS

Oh my God! It's terrible, I just tried to order a video from the MVM catalogue and I was told that I couldn't because some idiot decides to destroy the entire English stock of anime; which basically means that we can't get the stuff in shops or from catalogues! I'm telling you, I could become mentally unstable if this, this unfortunate set of circumstances continues any longer. Most of my friends enjoy, collect and rely on anime to get us through our daily lives. I'm sorry but I can't accept the fact that I might have to live without my daily dosage of anime. I'll cry, I'll, I'll, oh God, it's all so pointless.

Please, please, please tell me what's going on because frankly I'm not prepared to pay the ridiculous import costs or order over the net. Why in hell are they destroying the stock in the first place?
John Davey, via e-mail

When Pioneer UK was shut down a couple of months ago, much of the company's stock was ordered destroyed, mainly end-runs of licences that were just about to lapse. This tale appears to have grown with the telling, and become a story of *all* the anime in Britain, burned in a gigantic pyre while cackling demons danced around the flames, though this was not the case. There are still several anime companies in the UK, and your friends should be able to get their fix elsewhere. ●

LOOK back in MANGA

Five years ago in the July 1995 *Manga Mania*, there were features on *Eight Man*, Hollywood's interest in virtual actors and the concluding part of Wil Overton's series of drawing in a manga style.
As well as the release of the *Ushio & Tora* music special, the UK saw the No More Hiroshimas festival, at which the indefatigable Frederik L. Schodt proclaimed to an audience of socialist workers: "I'm not a Marxist! I'm an American!"

In the US, Adam Warren sent a love-letter to fandom with the tongue-in-cheek *Dirty Pair: Fatal but not Serious* and Studio Go brought out the first in their *Starblazers* pseudomanga series.

In Japan, the big news was the forthcoming *Fire Emblem* and the anime that would eventually be released abroad as *Tokyo Revelation*. Quote of the month from the letters page: "Assuming there are 50,000 Manga Maniacs out there, that still means that 2,500 of those readers are female. So, all you females out there, take a deep breath and feel proud of your unique existence."

L WORD

A S T

Paul Watson on anime's best friend...

Happy Birthday Gameboy

Pokémon. There I've said it. The "latest craze" and this time with an anime twist. I've watched my friend's daughter play the game for hours but, personally, I'd rather not. Why is it then, that every time I go to the fridge, I come face to face with a talking Meowth? (It was a present, by the way). Love 'em or hate 'em, you just can't get away from the buggers.

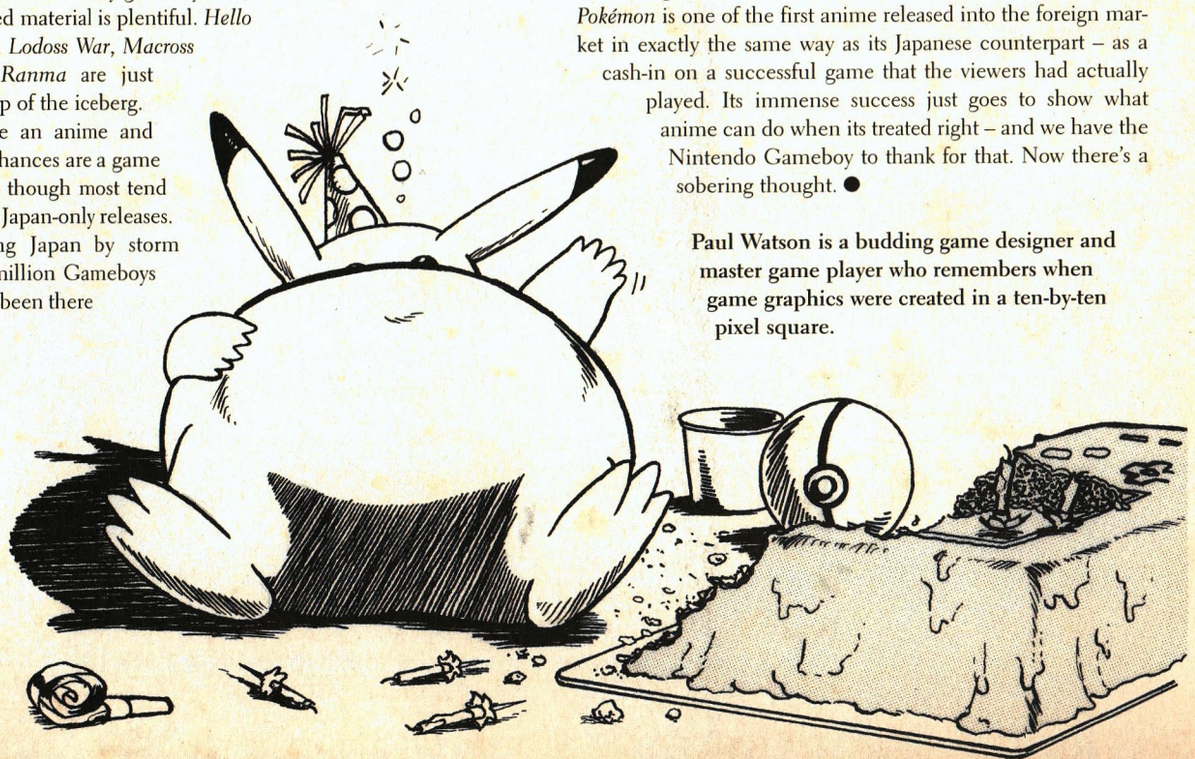
Coming from a field in which the Japanese excel, smaller and funkier gadgets, the Gameboy is an amazing success story of its own. With it's tenth birthday this year and 100 million units sold world-wide to date, Gameboy has the largest user base of any current games system. Considering Gameboy's age and the rapidly evolving world of technology and video game entertainment, the fact that it is still amazingly popular is a testament to the engineering of creator Gunpei Yokei and, more recently, *Pokémon*, its biggest game. Despite competitors that were more technically advanced and featured colour displays, Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi's insistence on forgoing a colour display in favour of cost and efficiency meant that Nintendo's baby was considerably cheaper. The fact that the classic tidy-up game, *Tetris*, was available on launch also helped. Even ex-President George Bush was photographed playing one!

Over the past 10 years, the Gameboy has had enough time to notch up an incredible collection of game titles. It's no surprise, as with every games system, that anime related material is plentiful. *Hello Kitty*, *Lodoss War*, *Macross* and *Ranma* are just the tip of the iceberg. Name an anime and the chances are a game exists though most tend to be Japan-only releases. Taking Japan by storm (16 million Gameboys have been there alone) Gameboys have even managed to find their way *into* the world of anime and manga. Akira Toriyama put an exploding one in *Dragonball* while I even remember seeing one in *Burn Up*. Funnily enough, that one also got destroyed. Maybe it's part of Nintendo's invasion plan. Exploding Gameboys in every house. Now, thanks to Nintendo and the Gameboy, we have one of the most successful anime series ever.

It's not just the Gameboy that has benefited from the *Pokémon* factor. Nintendo's N64 console, despite being home to some classic games, performed extremely badly against the PlayStation. *Pokémon Stadium* (a game that you can upload your Gameboy Pokémon into) comes along and suddenly N64 sales shoot up by 30 per cent. The power of the *Pokémon* is ever present.

Pokémon Yellow has recently hit the stores in the UK and three *Pokémon* spin-off games are to be released here before Christmas, and that's not including *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver*. Plenty more animation is poised to hit our screens and merchandise will continue to flood the stores. *Pokémon* and Gameboy have certainly got a lot of steam left in them, and the next generation Gameboy, the Gameboy Advance, is due for release in Japan towards the end of the year.

So many anime have been released out of context, distanced from the game or book or comic that originally inspired them. *Pokémon* is one of the first anime released into the foreign market in exactly the same way as its Japanese counterpart – as a cash-in on a successful game that the viewers had actually played. Its immense success just goes to show what anime can do when its treated right – and we have the Nintendo Gameboy to thank for that. Now there's a sobering thought. ●



Paul Watson is a budding game designer and master game player who remembers when game graphics were created in a ten-by-ten pixel square.

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- **2: Invasion of the Black Gears**
- **3: Andromon's Attack- Bright** (Aug)

- **Pokemon:The Movie 2000 £3.99**

BOOKS: REFERENCE

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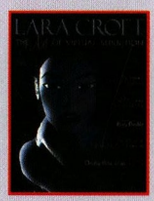
  - S Lamm (ed.) NEW (Oct) (HB)
  Complete pre-production archive of artwork, conceptual drawings alongside script and commentary. Four-colour through-out.

- **Lara Croft: The Art of Virtual Seduction £12.99**
  (Sep) NEW
  Highly detailed, full colour throughout with images, interviews with creators, Lara inspired art, internet & movie news and more!



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Pokemon GameBalls NEW (Aug) **@£6.99**
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  (Sep) **£11.99**
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